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by ELIZABETH BAKER

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(*Continued on page* 101)

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BERT'S GIRL

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ELIZABETH BAKER

LONDON
ERNEST BENN LIMITED
Bouverie House, Fleet Street
1927

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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Produced at the Court Theatre, London, under the management of Sir Barry Jackson, on March 30th, 1927, with the following cast:

Mrs. Walters	Minnie Rayner
Bert	Henry Caine
Basil	A. J. Denton
Iris	Nadine March
Evelyn	Phyllis Percy
Stella Marsh	Dorothy Black
Daisy	Marjorie Larcombe
Mrs. Tatt	Madge Trenchard
Edgar Tatt	Edward Chapman
Martin Trent	Julian D'Albie
John Puttock	Wilson Coleman
Stephen Quinton	George Blackwood

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CHARACTERS

MRS. WALTERS	
BERT BASIL IRIS	*Her children*
EVELYN	BASIL'S *wife*
STELLA MARSH	BERT'S *girl*
DAISY	*Maid*
MRS. TATT	
EDGAR TATT	*Her son*
MARTIN TRENT	
JOHN PUTTOCK	
STEPHEN QUINTON	

ACT I—MRS. WALTERS' *drawing-room in a London suburb. Evening.*

ACT II—TRENT'S *room in the same house. Next day.*

ACT III—*The same. Some weeks later.*

ACT IV—*As in Act I. The next evening.*

TIME: *Present.*

No Cockney accent should be affected in the play nor aitches dropped.

Stage directions written as from front.

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ACT I

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MRS. WALTERS' *drawing-room: somewhat over-furnished, with a good many photographs on piano and overmantel and gilt-framed pictures and brightly coloured cushions decorated with large bows. Door up stage, C. Fireplace R. Piano up L. The room is empty as curtain rises.*

DAISY *flounces in. She is a very modern "general," pert and smartly got up in her black frock and frilly apron and cap. She is pretty in a big fair showy style. Her real purpose in coming in is supposed to be to attend to fire, draw curtains, etc. Instead, goes to the mirror over fire-place and stands there fluffing her hair over her ears, preening herself.*

IRIS *enters before she can turn from the mirror.* IRIS *is slim and pretty, but rather fretful. She is always smartly dressed if the smartness is somewhat flashy.*

IRIS (*sharply*): The fire has got very low.

[DAISY *stoops and pokes fire aimlessly, but with affected vigour. Her manner is resentful. Then turns to go.*

IRIS: Mr. Albert gone?

DAISY: Yes, miss.

IRIS: How long has he been gone?

DAISY (*self-conscious, defiant*): I'm sure I don't know, miss——

IRIS: You must know when he went.

DAISY: I can't remember exactly—(*looking at clock*) about an hour ago, miss.

[*She flounces out.* IRIS *comes to fire-place.* MRS. WALTERS *enters—a plump, fussy woman.*

MRS. WALTERS: Oh, there you are! This room *is* hot!

IRIS: I don't find it so. Daisy let the fire go down and it's only just been made up. I came in and found her admiring herself, as usual.

MRS. WALTERS (*wiping her face with her handkerchief*): You needn't have told her to make up a fire for roasting!

IRIS: We can't all be cold because you've got on that stupid tight dress.

MRS. WALTERS (*indignantly*): It isn't tight—it's quite loose. (*Endeavours to shake herself to prove its looseness.*)

IRIS (*with a little laugh*): I'd like to see you in a tighter. Why don't you speak to Daisy? She's a cat.

MRS. WALTERS: I can't do anything. You know how difficult it is to get girls nowadays. If I said a word she'd be off.

IRIS: And the way she and Bert go on!

MRS. WALTERS: She's a bold hussy. She's always making eyes at him.

IRIS: Of course, you put it all on to her!

MRS. WALTERS: There you go! Now that Bert's got engaged you ought to know better than to talk like that. Hasn't he got a girl of his own? You're always saying things about him.

IRIS: A girl of his own! Fat lot of difference that'll make. The men are all alike—beasts! I bet he was larking about with Daisy this afternoon instead of getting off to the station to meet his girl. I put a question or two to her, that I did, and Master Bert didn't leave any too early. What did you want to go rushing out for, leaving them alone in the house?

MRS. WALTERS: Who are you talking to, miss? Well, if you want to know, it was all because of Eve! That girl—with her airs and tempers. There was a postcard from Basil to say he and Eve were coming this evening. You know what that means. Eve won't touch tinned meat, and after I'd got that nice bit of pressed beef in, too. And if she doesn't get what she likes, a nice temper Bas will be in. So out I had to go, after dressing and all, to get something for Miss Evelyn's supper. A nice life I lead, don't I? And I had to get fish; there wasn't anything else I could think of, and that'll mean frying, and Daisy won't like that. She'll sulk. And now here am I instead of being quiet and comfortable

and getting time for forty winks, like I might expect, all flustered and dripping with perspiration. Look at me!

IRIS: You do look a beauty and no mistake. I suppose old Eve had to come and have a look at Bert's girl. Jealous cat.

MRS. WALTERS: I do wonder what she'll be like. I don't think anyone can quite understand a mother's feelings when her boys get engaged. You never know who will get hold of them. And Bert is so good-natured; any designing girl might take him in.

IRIS: Oh, shut up, Mum! You ought to know Bert by this time. I'd like to see anybody who could take him in. And you've only got to look at his girl to see she couldn't take anybody in. (*Picks up a photograph from piano and stares at it and then laughs.*) I bet she brings one of those rush-basket things for her luggage. Fancy old Bert lugging it along. What a lark!

MRS. WALTERS: It's you who's talking now, miss. Bert's got good taste, and I'm sure I hope she'll be a nice good girl and make my boy happy.

[IRIS, *after replacing photo, touches piano keys idly; then she turns round sharply.*

IRIS: Did you have the man in to tune the piano?

MRS. WALTERS (*disconcerted*): There—I forgot all about it.

IRIS: Really, mum, you are an idiot. How can we ask Evelyn to sing now, and if we don't that'll make Bas like a raging bear. I told you to get it done.

MRS. WALTERS: Perhaps you did, but I can't remember everything. And then Uncle Martin came in and——

IRIS: You always drag in Uncle Martin if you forget anything.

MRS. WALTERS: You mind your manners. You don't know your Uncle Martin as I do. You're out all day. There was I, all of a tremble because I thought he'd come to grumble about Bert the other night.

IRIS: Did he say anything?

MRS. WALTERS: No, he didn't, as it happens. But he might. I do think Bert ought to know better, coming home all hours of the night and then making such a row. I spoke to him about it yesterday. Here we are, I said, living rent free in a nice house in a good position and all, and you might learn to come home quietly. If you're not careful, I said, Uncle Martin will turn us out and then we shall be in a nice way. But, of course, nothing I said made any difference. It never does, to any of you. I might as well be a log as your own mother. All he said was he was a man and should come home when he liked and how he liked. He said Uncle Martin wouldn't mind—and of course Uncle does seem very fond of Bert, so perhaps it doesn't matter. (*Sighs heavily.*)

IRIS: And Uncle never said anything after all?

MRS. WALTERS: No, but I did. I thought I'd better mention it. It's all very well for you with your off-hand ways, but how'd you like it if he turned us out? It's me that has to do all the thinking. So I said to him—" Uncle Martin," I said, " I hope Bert didn't disturb you the other night. He'd been to a little party "—of course he hadn't, only to Basil's, but I had to put it like that—" and he came home a bit lively."

IRIS: If the old idiot didn't like noise he'd have sent us flying long ago. You do fuss!

MRS. WALTERS: That's all very well, but you never know with Uncle. He's so queer—sometimes he won't mind a thing, and then again he will. It's his head, I suppose.

IRIS: And what did he say to you after all?

MRS. WALTERS: Well, you know what he is. I can't remember exactly what he said—I never can—he's that queer in his talk sometimes. But I don't think he minded a bit, really. And then, as I say, he's fond of Bert in his way, I'm sure. I believe he'll leave his money to him.

IRIS: And I suppose you'd call that fair—when all of us have to put up with the rude old bear.

MRS. WALTERS: But he doesn't interfere with us really, and I expect he'll leave me this house. That would be lovely. We must expect to put up with something. That's how I put it to Bert—but you know what he is; just went on eating his bacon, and never a word. How is my hair?

IRIS: You've got it done all right, but the colour's mouldy. You ought to have it dyed again. I said you'd have to.

MRS. WALTERS: The man who did it said it'd last for years.

IRIS: If you believe all they tell you in shops you must be soft. I wonder what Evelyn will wear to-night.

MRS. WALTERS: Basil thinks nobody dresses like her.

IRIS: He can if he likes. Other people think different.

MRS. WALTERS: I believe last Sunday she'd blacked her eyebrows.

IRIS: I know she had.

MRS. WALTERS: I really feel like telling Basil.

IRIS: If you do you'll get your eye in a sling.

MRS. WALTERS: Of course, Eve's a dear girl, but I do call her a little loud, and she's frightfully extravagant in the house.

[*Two knocks on the door.*

That's Uncle Martin.

[*She rises hastily and crosses to door. Even* IRIS, *despite her defiant manner, is a little perturbed.* MRS. WALTERS *opens door.*

It *is* Uncle. Do come in, Uncle. You know you need never knock.

[MARTIN TRENT *comes just inside and stares round and over at* IRIS *quizzically. He is between sixty and seventy years of age, thin and unhealthy-looking. Thick eyebrows overhang piercing eyes. He is very excitable, and his manner very variable. There is a touch of eccentricity about him which he often consciously elaborates out of a puckish desire to puzzle people. Amused chuckles and sharp anger are apt to follow one another quickly in his moods.*

TRENT (*abruptly*): What am I to come in for?

MRS. WALTERS (*almost coaxingly*): To see us, of course. It isn't often you grace our humble room. Iris, prepare a chair.

[IRIS *pats a chair invitingly.*

IRIS: Sit down, Uncle.

TRENT (*ignoring the invitation*): Are you going to have a party?

MRS. WALTERS: Only just a few friends. Do join us. Bert is bringing home his girl——

TRENT (*sharply*): His what?

MRS. WALTERS (*disconcerted*): His g——; his young lady. He'd be so pleased if you'd stop and see her.

[TRENT *chuckles.*

TRENT: Oh, so Bert's been out with a bow and arrow, eh?

MRS. WALTERS (*not understanding but persevering in attention*): You should stop and meet her. Bert is sure to have a nice girl. You know what he is. And it's quite romantic. He met her at Margate at a week-end party. They'd only been out together half a dozen times when they got engaged. Isn't that so, Iris? Fancy—Bert! He must have got it badly. (*Laughs.*)

TRENT (*suddenly, harshly*): What colour is she?

MRS. WALTERS (*astonished*): Colour——?

TRENT: Black, brown, yellow, red——

MRS. WALTERS (*helplessly*): She's a Margate girl, isn't she, Iris?

TRENT: How am I to know her when I do see her?

MRS. WALTERS: Why, she'll be with Bert, of course. Won't she, Iris?

IRIS: We don't know what she's like ourselves yet; we haven't seen her.

MRS. WALTERS: But we don't feel a bit anxious, because we know what Bert is. He's got good taste. Of course, I don't suppose we shall think she's good enough—you know what mothers are——

[*A commotion at the door.* DAISY *comes in, pushing past* TRENT, *and announces* MRS. TATT *and* MR. TATT. TRENT *moves a little down R.* MRS. TATT *comes in, greeting* MRS. WALTERS *effusively. She is a nondescript middle-aged woman addicted to black silk and much white lace.* EDGAR, *her son, is rather fat and simple.*

MRS. WALTERS: Oh, is that you! There you are then!

[*After greeting* MRS. WALTERS, EDGAR *sidles up to* IRIS. TRENT *turns to go.*

Uncle, don't run away. This is a friend of ours, Mrs. Tatt, and this is her son, Mr. Tatt. My uncle, Mr. Trent——

MRS. TATT (*seizing* TRENT'S *hand and shaking it effusively while he stares at her with great curiosity*): *How* are you? I am *so* pleased to meet you. Edgar darling, did you hear, this is Mrs. Walters' uncle. We have so *often* heard of you, Mr. Trent. Edgar darling, I'm sure you have *often* heard Mrs. Walters talk of him and his *great* kindness.

[EDGAR *comes up to* TRENT *and extends a fat limp hand.*

EDGAR: Good evening. Pleased to meet you.

[TRENT *seizes the hand and stares into* EDGAR'S *face.*

TRENT: It's fat—and white—and it crawls!

[*He drops the hand quickly and exit abruptly. The others stand staring after him.*

MRS. WALTERS (*to* MRS. TATT): Whatever do you think of him! Sit down, dear.

MRS. TATT (*sitting near* MRS. WALTERS): Pray don't mention it, dear. I don't mind him in the least. I see what a trial you have to put up with.

IRIS: He's a hateful old thing.

MRS. TATT: I don't think we should say that, my dear. He's evidently—— (*touches her forehead significantly*). We none of us know what we might come to ourselves. It's a dreadful thought, and should enlarge our sympathies.

MRS. WALTERS: You do think he's mad, don't you? Queer, you know, though harmless, of course.

MRS. TATT: Oh yes, my dear, quite. Why, he took Edgar for some animal or something.

[*Indicates* EDGAR, *who sits ogling* IRIS.

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, what a shame.

IRIS: He may be mad about some things, but anyway he isn't too far gone to have his own friends in and out, and do a nice bit of business now and then.

MRS. WALTERS: But his friends are all queer, like him.

MRS. TATT: You don't mean he still does business?

MRS. WALTERS: Not in a regular sort of way, of course, not since he gave up his shop, but he's got things upstairs which he sells. He's worth a lot of money.

MRS. TATT: That's what it is, I expect. His money has turned his brain. It does with some people. And those who deal in curiosities are always rather queer, aren't they?

MRS. WALTERS: And there now, Iris, I don't know what he came in for after all—some message about his supper, I dare say.

IRIS: Why doesn't he give his messages to Daisy? That's what she's for.

MRS. WALTERS (*to* MRS. TATT): He doesn't like her, you know. Sometimes he won't have her near him. Really, it is a life!

MRS. TATT: It must be. But you have the satisfaction of knowing you help to make his life happy. You are all so kind to him, I know.

MRS. WALTERS: I'm sure I try to be, though he's dreadfully difficult to get on with. Sometimes I hardly see him for weeks—he won't have any of us near him, even to get his meals. He'll have them all out. Then sometimes he'll pop in on us like this.

IRIS: Rude old pig. If he hates us, why doesn't he go somewhere else to live?

MRS. WALTERS: That's what she's always saying, but what I want to know is, if he hates us, why did he let us come here and live rent free?

MRS. TATT (*awed*): Rent free?

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, ever since my poor Harold died and I was left with the children on my hands.

EDGAR (*struck into speech*): Rent free! I say, fancy that!

MRS. WALTERS: And it wasn't as if he was quite a real uncle as you may say—only a kind of step-uncle or second cousin of my poor dear husband.

MRS. TATT: I think it all shows, don't you, that he isn't quite right in his head. I'm sure we should all be very sorry for him. As I said before, we never know.

MRS. WALTERS: And now do come and take off your hat and coat. Iris, I leave you to look after Mr. Tatt. (*Smiles archly at* IRIS *and* EDGAR.)

[MRS. WALTERS *and* MRS. TATT *exit. Left alone,* EDGAR *is more self-conscious than ever, and* IRIS *coy and pert alternately.*

EDGAR: Bert isn't home yet, then?

IRIS: No.

EDGAR: Basil coming along to-night?

IRIS: If his wife lets him. (*Both laugh.*)

EDGAR: Bert's late, isn't he?

IRIS: He's gone to meet his young lady. I expect they'll be rather late.

EDGAR: I suppose so. They—they always are when they're with young ladies, aren't they?

IRIS: I don't know, I'm sure.

EDGAR: Don't you?

IRIS: How should I?

EDGAR: You ought to—having brothers who've got girls.

IRIS: Perhaps I do know a little—from them.

EDGAR (*feeling himself hugely sophisticated*): And other girls' brothers.

IRIS: Oh no, of course not. (*Both laugh. Pause.*) I wonder what Bert's girl will be like.

EDGAR: I wonder. (*Pause.*) I didn't think he'd do the trick just yet.

IRIS: He's quite soft on her.

EDGAR: He must be, to go and get engaged. (*Both laugh.*)

IRIS: And he's only been going out with her a little while.

EDGAR: She must be jolly clever to catch Bert like that.

IRIS: That's what you men always do—put it down to the girls.

EDGAR: Do we?

IRIS: Don't you?

[*At this interesting juncture the door opens and* BASIL *and* EVELYN *come in.* BASIL *is a male edition of* IRIS. EVELYN *is large and handsome and affectedly blasé. She is smartly dressed.*

BASIL: Hope we don't intrude.

[EDGAR *laughs self-consciously. The two girls meet, C., and kiss peckily, giving one another a swift all-over stare.*

EVELYN: How d'ye do, dear.

IRIS: You're late.

EVELYN: Been to a *matinée*—rotten show. (*Looking round.*) Hasn't she come yet?

IRIS: No.

BASIL: She's dying to see Bert's girl. Afraid of being cut out.

EVELYN (*disdainfully*): Really!

IRIS: Come and take off your things.

EVELYN (*as she goes*): I assure you, I'm not afraid of anyone or anything.

[*Exit* IRIS *and* EVELYN. *The two young men left alone have really nothing to say.* BASIL *stretches himself at full length in an easy chair. Both smoke.*

BASIL (*spasmodically*): My word! Jealousy! Give me girls!

EDGAR: Awful, isn't it? (*Laughs. Pause.*)

BASIL: Take my tip—nothing to do with 'em.

EDGAR: But you're married.

BASIL: That's why, dear boy.

[EDGAR *laughs loudly.* BASIL *smokes profoundly, unsmiling.* MRS. TATT *and* MRS. WALTERS *come in.*

MRS. WALTERS: You seem to be enjoying yourself. Please tell us the joke.

BASIL: Couldn't; not decent. (EDGAR *laughs.*)

[*The two ladies seat themselves.*

MRS. WALTERS: If it's one of Basil's jokes, I'm sure I quite understand. How well dear Evelyn is looking, Bas.

BASIL: Her feed's all right. (EDGAR *laughs.*) Putting on flesh.

MRS. WALTERS: Just hear him! What would Eve say?

BASIL: I don't mind—can't have too much of a good thing, eh, Tatt?

EDGAR: I don't know anything about it.

BASIL: Oh, you don't, don't you? (EDGAR *laughs.*)

[IRIS *and* EVELYN *enter.*

EVELYN (*patting her hair*): I hope you like it at the back, dear. Bas thinks it looks frightfully smart. He says I'm like Gwennie Glow in that play *The Telephone Girl.*

IRIS: It's all right if you don't mind showing your ears.

EVELYN: Oh, of course, you've got to have the right sort of ears. It's a style that wouldn't do for everyone. Your style suits you perfectly, dear.

MRS. WALTERS: How did you enjoy the theatre? Was it a nice piece?

EVELYN: Oh, we've seen it before. All the chorus had new dresses.

BASIL: Undresses.

MRS. TATT: So witty, isn't he?

IRIS: Was that Moss girl in it?

EVELYN: Of course. But she can't sing.

BASIL: You're better than her.

EVELYN: That's no compliment. I should hope I am.

IRIS: She's only there for her looks.

EVELYN: And they're nothing to boast of, are they?

IRIS: I can't think why they put her in it.

EVELEN: Oh, my dear, I dare say it's easy enough to explain.

MRS. TATT: It's dreadful, isn't it, how some people live. But there, we mustn't judge harshly. As I say, we never know what we may come to ourselves.

MRS. WALTERS: Was that a taxi?

BASIL: Now then, Eve, sit up!

EVELYN: Don't be absurd.

MRS. WALTERS: It is. I'm sure it is.

[*Hurries to door. Sound of voices without. Then the door is opened boisterously and* BERT WALTERS *and* STELLA *come in.* BERT *is confident, easy-going; patronisingly pleasant to women, facetious with men.* STELLA *is graceful and somewhat diffident in manner. She is handsome, with a well-rounded figure—some people might call her large.* BERT *takes command of the whole situation with breezy, swaggering assurance.*

MRS. WALTERS: So here you are at last.

BERT: Always keep the best to the end, you know. Can't make ourselves cheap by coming too early. Toodle-do, everybody. How's Mrs. Tattersall, eh, mater? This is Stella. This is Iris, Stell. Not so bad when you know her, but wants some knowing.

[*He chucks* IRIS *under the chin.* IRIS *shakes hands limply with* STELLA.

IRIS: Pleased to meet you.

BERT (*to* STELLA): Take them all in (*waving his hand round*). Bas—my dear little brother—Mrs. Tatt——

MRS. TATT: Really, I feel quite an intruder being here on such a happy family occasion.

STELLA: Thank you—it's very nice—— (*Stops shyly and looks round for* BERT.)

BERT (*indicating* EVELYN): This is Eve—I've told you about her. She's Basil's missus, and you're going to be mine, so you may as well be friends. This is Edgar, his mamma's darling.

MRS. TATT (*playfully*): Now, Mr. Walters.

EDGAR (*shaking hands awkwardly*): Pleased to meet you.

MRS. WALTERS: I'm sure you must be tired, dear, after your journey.

STELLA: Oh no, it didn't seem very long—and then we had tea.

EVELYN: Where did you go for tea? Up west?

STELLA (*looking inquiringly at* BERT): I don't know——

BERT: The Pagoda, of course.

STELLA: It was very nice.

BASIL: It's called Cuddle Corner—girls love it.

[*General laughter*—STELLA *joining a little wonderingly.*

BERT: That's a chestnut. Stell, you'd better take your things off. Mater, take her upstairs, or Iris can.

MRS. WALTERS: Come with me, dear. You must be tired.

STELLA: Thank you very much.

[MRS. WALTERS *and* STELLA *go out.*

BERT: She's shy—you mustn't mind her for a bit. She'll pull round.

MRS. TATT: I'm sure, Mr. Walters, she's got a *sweet* face, hasn't she, Edgar?

BERT: She'll pull round. Well, I'll just change my tootsies and make myself decent. (*Exit whistling.*)

IRIS: Well!

EVELYN: I don't think much of Bert's idea of style!

IRIS: Whatever can he see in her!

BASIL: Search me!

IRIS: What a dowd!

MRS. TATT: But she's got a good kind face, hasn't she? and after all, that is what matters. I'm sure she'll make a splendid wife for dear Mr. Walters.

EDGAR: She's rather pretty in a sort of way, don't you think?

BASIL: Not for me, thanks.

IRIS: And her figure——

EVELYN: Her what?

BASIL: Where is it?

IRIS: I can't get over it. Bert, too!

BASIL: I bet she can cook; trust Bertie for looking after his grub.

EDGAR: You want somebody who can cook, don't you?

BASIL: Iris can't.

IRIS: What's that got to do with it?

BASIL: Don't ask me.

MRS. TATT: Where did he find her, did you say?

IRIS: At Margate when he was spending a week-end there. She was a friend or something of the people who kept the boarding-house. Bert was awfully gone on her. Isn't it funny. He went down to Margate two weeks running to see her—though of course he didn't tell us that.

MRS. TATT: And now she's come to stay with you for a holiday. How delightful?

IRIS: No; she's left Margate. She had some sort of job there—clerk or something. But Bert's going to get her into Blackley's, and she'll be here till he can find her some digs.

BASIL: Till they can get spliced, you mean. That's what they're after.

MRS. TATT: And hasn't she any friends or relations—at Margate or anywhere?

IRIS: She was with some kind of cousin or something. That's all she's got. But Bert didn't like the job for her. He wouldn't let her stop.

BASIL: Wanted to keep his eye on her. I know.

MRS. TATT: Well, I'm sure I hope they will be very happy. I always say if you get the right people marriage is the happiest state. If only she and dear Mr. Walters are as happy as I and Edgar's father were, I can wish nothing more for them.

IRIS: I hope she'll buck up a bit if she's going to be here long.

MRS. TATT: I'm sure she will, dear, when she has been with you all a little time. You are so bright. You will cheer her up.

[BERT *enters.*

BASIL: Well, Bertie, what's it feel like?

[BERT *offers cigarettes all round, pressing them particularly on* MRS. TATT, *who laughingly refuses.*

BERT: What's what feel like?

MRS. TATT: Now, Mr. Walters, you will have your joke.

BERT (*affecting surprise at her refusal*): No? Sorry. My mistake.

BASIL: Shy, Bertie?

BERT: What's that?

BASIL: Like it?

BERT: Look here, my boy, you aren't talking to your wife, so sit up and speak properly. Do I like what?

BASIL: Girls are nice, aren't they?

BERT: You ought to know, if anybody does. You'll have to watch him, Eve. He'll slip the chain if you aren't sharp.

EVELYN: Let him try.

BERT: When he wants to stay behind in the City on business, just you go up and look for him. Take my tip.

BASIL: She'll scratch my eyes out.

EVELYN: You are a beast.

IRIS: Men all are. Talk about love!

BERT: Don't be jealous, Iris, my child. Your turn's coming (*to* EDGAR)—isn't it?

IRIS: I'm sure I wouldn't have one of you—or anything like you—at a gift.

BERT: Suppose you wait till you're asked. Or perhaps you'd like to do the asking yourself. Go ahead; don't mind us.

[*In the midst of the resulting laughter* MRS. WALTERS *and* STELLA *come in.*

MRS. WALTERS (*knowingly*): I know now why they were late. They came the longest way round.

STELLA (*innocently*): It was a lovely ride.

[*Laughter.*

BERT: Come over here, Stell.

[*She comes to him, and he puts his arm round her with patronising affection.*

Never mind them. You'll be up to them in a little while.

IRIS: If you're going to take her in hand she'll get a long way past us.

MRS. WALTERS: I'm sure it will do her a lot of good to be with us a little while. Her life has been very dull.

MRS. TATT: That's what I've been saying, you are all so bright.

BERT: Oh, she'll soon pull round, won't you?

BASIL: You aren't in a taxi now, Bert.

MRS. WALTERS: Aren't they a dreadful lot! And now I'm sure Evelyn will sing to us—won't you, dear?

BERT: Go on, Eve, give us a squall.

EVELYN: Don't mind me, Bert.

MRS. WALTERS (*to* STELLA): She sings so beautifully, dear.

[EVELYN *rises languidly and undulates towards piano.*

EVELYN: I haven't brought any of my songs.

BASIL: I told you to bring some, old girl.

EVELYN: Perhaps you did.

MRS. WALTERS: Oh, but there are some of hers here, aren't there, Iris? Do find one, dear. Stella will love to hear you sing.

STELLA: Oh yes, please.

MRS. TATT (*to* STELLA): Do you sing, Miss—er——?

BERT: Stella is her name—that's good enough for us.

STELLA: No, I can't sing. I'm afraid I can't do anything much.

BERT: She'll pick up something by and by. She'll pull round, won't you?

STELLA: I'll try to.

EVELYN (*glancing at music on piano*): There's nothing decent here.

IRIS: There must be, Eve. (*Flounces to piano and throws a batch of songs on stool.*) There they are. Find one for yourself.

EDGAR (*sheepishly offering* IRIS *a part of his chair*): Sit down.

IRIS: There isn't room.

EDGAR: Yes, there is.

[IRIS *shares the seat.*

BASIL: Shall I come and sit in the middle?

IRIS: Shut up, Bas.

EVELYN: There's only this old thing. (*Holding up song.*)

MRS. WALTERS: Do sing it, dear.

MRS. TATT: Oh, do! There is something so touching about old songs, isn't there? They often make me think of old friends. We throw them aside, as you might say, and then some day we find out how dear they are, don't we?

BASIL: Go on, Eve.

BERT: Hold on tight for sister Evie's top note.

[EVELYN *sits at piano and strikes a chord, then turns sharply.*

EVELYN: Haven't you had this thing tuned?

MRS. WALTERS (*deprecatingly*): I'm so sorry, dear, but——

BASIL: I told you to get it done, didn't I?

IRIS: And I told her of it, too, and then she went and forgot.

EVELYN (*leaving piano haughtily*): Then I can't sing. It was too disgusting last time.

BASIL: Of course you can't.

MRS. WALTERS: I'm so sorry, Eve.

[EVELYN *undulates back to her seat.*

BASIL: It's no good being sorry now.

MRS. WALTERS (*with feeble spirit*): Well, really, I can't think of everything. Suppose you do a little of the thinking. I'm sure what with——

BERT: Well, cheer up everybody. What time's supper?

IRIS: Not just yet.

BASIL: Eve is going to sing at the Thompsons' concert next week, and they're having the piano specially tuned. I should think if they can do it we can!

BERT: Don't row about it.

BASIL: If it was your wife——

EVELYN: It really doesn't matter. I ought to rest my voice. I have to be very careful.

MRS. TATT: Of course, you must take care of it. A good voice is such a great gift. Think of the pleasure we can give people with it. How gratefully you must be to have that blessing, Mrs. Basil.

EVELYN: Oh, some people don't think my voice is anything —but it doesn't matter.

IRIS: Shut up, Eve!

BERT: Well, if you want cheering up and nobody else offers, I'll oblige.

STELLA (*surprised and pleased*): Do you sing? I didn't know.

EDGAR: Oh, Bert's great at comic songs.

IRIS: Do you mean to tell me he didn't sing at Margate? Usually he won't let anyone else be heard.

BERT: They'd got some chap there who thought he could sing and never gave anybody else a chance. Did he, Stell?

STELLA: Did you mean Mr. Lloyd? I—I liked him.

BERT (*not pleased*): Did you. Well, I didn't. Couldn't sing a comic for nuts. Now then, Iris, get out of that chair and come and thump for me. Even she likes to hear me sing, don't you? (*Chucks her under the chin as she passes him to go to the piano.*)

IRIS: It's the one thing you can do.

BERT: What shall it be, ladies and gentlemen?

EDGAR: That one you gave us last week——

BERT: What—" Married Life "? Fie, fie, I'm ashamed of you.

IRIS: They sang that in the ark. Here, this one

MRS. WALTERS (*to* STELLA): If you've never heard Bert sing, you have got a treat, dear. You'll simply love it.

EDGAR: What I say is, Bert's as good as George Robey any day.

BERT (*flattered*): Cut it, old man.

MRS. TATT: I must say I like a good humorous song. It does one good. I'm not strait-laced, like some people. There is so much sorrow in the world that one must have a little amusement sometimes, mustn't one? (*To* STELLA.)

STELLA: I like to laugh.

[BERT *puts a song on the piano.*

EDGAR: What's that?

BERT: A bit of all right. (*To* IRIS.) Now then, jig away.

[BERT *delivers himself of a comic song with a good deal of vulgar suggestiveness about it. Everybody enjoys it hugely, though* STELLA *looks a little bewildered as the song proceeds. This is a new phase of* BERT *to her.*

BERT: Now then, the chorus—all together.

[*They are all in the middle of the chorus when the door opens suddenly and* TRENT *stands looking in. There is an instant pause, and everyone, save* STELLA, *becomes self-conscious.* MRS. WALTERS *gets up fussily, and* BERT *now rises, as he considers, nobly to an awkward situation.*

BERT: What O, Uncle!—just in time for some music. Now then, the chorus again. Uncle will like it. Chip in, Uncle.

[BERT *starts the chorus again, but nobody joins in with much gusto, and it fades away.* TRENT *has stared round the room in his customary manner, and now sees* STELLA. *He comes a little further in, his eyes on her.*

BERT: Come in and make yourself at home, Uncle. Where will you sit?

[BERT *looks round knowingly at the company as one who understands how to humour eccentric relatives.*

TRENT (*staring at* STELLA): Who is that?

MRS. WALTERS: This is Bert's girl, Uncle.

[STELLA *has risen beneath* TRENT'S *intent look, and now he and she meet, C.* BERT *comes up and stands beside* STELLA.

BERT: This is my young lady, Uncle. This is Uncle Martin, Stell. You'll soon be making friends.

TRENT (*to* STELLA): What is your name?

STELLA: Stella.

[*Pause.*

TRENT: What are you doing here?

[STELLA *glances uncertainly at* BERT. *He puts his arm round her.*

BERT (*patronisingly explanatory*): My young lady, Uncle —going to marry me. They always get you in the end, you know, the girls, don't they? I was caught like the rest.

[TRENT *ignores* BERT *and the explanation.*

TRENT (*suddenly, harshly*): And Hebe fell in love with a toad!

[*Everyone is taken aback; then* BERT *rallies.*

BERT: That's it, Uncle—you've got it. Now sit down and let's have a drink. Mater, get the——

[*Again* TRENT *ignores him.*

TRENT (*staring at them both*): Nature! (*Laughs sourly.*) Nature be damned! (*Turns and goes abruptly.*)

MRS. WALTERS: Well, really, what language—and before ladies.

BERT (*to* STELLA): Don't take any notice of him; he's cracked.

EDGAR: I should say so. Right off, and no mistake.

MRS. TATT: There are some people who when they go mad use the most awful language. Isn't it funny!

IRIS: What did he want to come in for? That's twice to-night.

MRS. WALTERS: Well, don't look at me like that. I don't know. I'm sure I didn't ask him. (*Suddenly.*) I tell you what it is—he came to see Stella.

IRIS: Oh, go on, Mum.

MRS. WALTERS: That's it, you may depend. You remember, Iris, I told him Bert was bringing home his girl, and I do believe he wanted to see what she's like.

BERT: That's it, you bet. The old boy wanted to know what sort of girl had got hold of me.

MRS. WALTERS: I always say Bert is a favourite of Uncle Martin's (*To* STELLA.) You mustn't mind him, dear; you must bear with him for Bert's sake.

IRIS: I'd like to know who he was calling a toad, anyway.

BERT: Oh, he made it up. You can see he didn't mean anybody here.

MRS. WALTERS: How could he? Of course he did, Iris.

MRS. TATT: How his mind must wander! Just before you came home, Mr. Walters, he was saying things like that to Edgar.

MRS. WALTERS: And Mrs. Tatt and Edgar took it so well.

MRS. TATT: The afflicted in mind call for our patience. I always try to remember we never know what we may come to ourselves.

MRS. WALTERS: I believe you remind him of somebody, Stella.

STELLA: Do you think so?

BERT: What makes you think that?

MRS. WALTERS: Didn't he say something about "Edie" or somebody?

IRIS: It wasn't Edie, Mum; it had an "h."

BASIL: It wasn't Hedie, I suppose! (*Laughter.*)

MRS. WALTERS (*to* STELLA): Did you catch what it was?

STELLA: Hebe—or something like that.

BASIL: Funny sort of name. Some old girl of his.

BERT: He didn't mean anything. He never does when he wanders on like that.

EVELYN: I believe I've heard the name somewhere. We used to read about it at school. But it can't be the same. Hebe, or whatever it was, had something to do with Venus or people like that.

BERT: Venus! (*Laughter.*) Here, I say, we're all respectable people here. If you're going to be like Venus, Stella, out you go.

STELLA (*smiling up at him*): I'm not, am I?

BERT: No, you're all right. But I tell you what, Nunky was thinking of the ladies he's got upstairs.

MRS. TATT (*shocked but smiling*): My dear Mr. Walters.

BERT: Oh, it's all right; they aren't alive.

BASIL: I shouldn't call them all right—the condition they're in.

EVELYN (*slapping him*): Be quiet.

BASIL: He's got Venus up there, and she doesn't blush, though she might for all she's——

BERT: Now then, you'll set all the girls going upstairs to see.

MRS. WALTERS: You're shocking Mrs. Tatt, Bert. (*To* MRS. TATT.) It's only their way, these boys; they're so lively. Uncle Martin has got a few statues, that's all—little ones, most of them.

BERT: Art, you know. Think I shall go in for art. It's fine.

[*Loud laughter.* STELLA *again looks round a little bewildered.* DAISY *comes to door.*

DAISY: Supper is ready, ma'am.

[*Everybody at once rises.* BASIL *and* EVELYN, *regardless of such things as precedence, go out first.*

MRS. TATT: Now, Edgar, do your duty.

EDGAR (*putting his arm round* IRIS): Like this?

IRIS (*pushing it away*): Stop it.

EDGAR (*offering his arm elaborately*): Beg pardon.

[*He and* IRIS *go out.*

MRS. WALTERS: Oh, these young people!

MRS. TATT: I love to see young people being young, don't you?

MRS. WALTERS (*looking back from doorway*): Now, you two—don't keep us waiting.

[*She and* MRS. TATT *go out.* BERT *draws* STELLA'S *arm through his.*

BERT: Well, having a good time? We're a jolly set, aren't we? I told you you'd find us A 1.

STELLA: Oh yes. Am I very dull? I don't seem to know what to say yet.

BERT: You'll pull round.

[*He attempts to lead her to door, but she detains him, C.*

STELLA: Didn't your uncle look at me funnily?

BERT: He's balmy. Don't mind him.

STELLA: Is he mad—really? His eyes didn't—— He stared at me as if—as if—— (*Stops.*)

BERT: I know his little ways. Never mind what he thinks about you. I like you—that's enough. (*Lifts her face up to his and kisses her noisily.*) Isn't it? (*She is not quite so responsive as he desires.*) What's up? Give me a kiss. (*She obeys. Then he holds her away from him a little, regarding her.*) You know, you are a stunner. If you were a little smarter you'd beat the lot of them here. Eve would be nothing to you.

STELLA (*doubtfully*): Don't you think I look nice?

BERT: You're all right, but nothing to what you can be when you've pulled round a bit. Look here, you talk to Evelyn a bit. That girl is the last word in smartness. You haven't had much of a chance before. Those girls in the Margate set were dowdy, if you like. Take a leaf out of Eve's book and she'll be nowhere.

STELLA (*hesitatingly*): Evelyn——

BERT: Or Iris, if you like. Though she is my sister, I don't mind saying she knows what's what. Now, let's come and feed.

STELLA (*wistfully*): I'll try to be smarter, Bert.

BERT: Oh, you'll be all right when you've pulled round.

[*They go out.*)

CURTAIN.

Title

Author

Accession No.

Call No.

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

ACT II

Title [redacted]

Author [redacted]

Accession No. [redacted]

Call No. [redacted]

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

Title

Author

Accession No.

Call No.

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

TRENT'S *sitting-room. Windows facing. Fire-place down R. Before the fire a table and a comfortable, if shabby, arm-chair. A large handsome chair of the throne type stands R.C. Down L. is a fair-sized plaster cast of a Greek runner; it stands on a pedestal. One or two smaller casts of famous models are about the room, here and there. The room suggests* TRENT'S *hobby—antiques and curios—though it is not overloaded with furniture and oddments. It is lighted by electric lights in wall sconces, and there is a reading-lamp on table. The room is in darkness as curtain rises, save for a glow from the fire. Exit down L. Door up L. into* TRENT'S *bedroom.*

A rap on door, repeated after a moment's pause, then DAISY *enters carrying cloth, knife and fork, etc., for* TRENT'S *supper. Uttering an impatient exclamation on finding the room in darkness, she turns on light near door and crosses R., and is in the act of clearing table for the cloth when* TRENT *enters up L. At sight of her he pauses.*

TRENT (*sharply*): Stop!

[DAISY *starts and turns.*

DAISY (*nervous but affecting defiance*): I've got to clear.

TRENT (*coming down stage*): Leave it.

[*She leaves the things exactly as they are and flounces L.* TRENT *stares intently at her as she passes him and flounces out.* TRENT *comes to fire and rings bell. Sets table himself. After a pause* MRS. WALTERS *comes in panting from stairs.*

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, Uncle—did you ring?

[TRENT *stares over at her.*

TRENT: That girl has got two more pimples.

MRS. WALTERS (*helplessly*): What—Daisy?—You mean?—Has—has she?

TRENT: I won't have pimples in this room—got enough myself. Haven't I told you so before?

MRS. WALTERS (*keeping near door for safety*): Did you? —Yes, I'm sure I'm very sorry. She's got such a bad skin, Uncle. All her family have; in fact, she's the best of the lot. One of her brothers is covered with spots, poor fellow. It's in the blood—they can't help it. (*Trails into silence, looking apologetically at* TRENT.)

[*Pause.* TRENT *stares at her while she is speaking, then turns away disgustedly.*

TRENT: And the handmaiden of the gods was Hebe.

[MRS. WALTERS, *at first nonplussed by this remark, has sudden enlightenment. She nods and smiles encouragingly.*

MRS. WALTERS: Yes—yes—I'll send her up—all right; she's coming—— (*Backs to door.*)

TRENT: Who?

MRS. WALTERS: Bert's girl—Edie, isn't it—in a minute. (*Disappears precipitately.*)

[*Left alone,* TRENT *bursts suddenly into a shout of laughter. Then he crosses to a small cast or picture of Venus di Milo, talking to himself as he goes.*

TRENT: Bert! Bert! Two pennyworth of mud and they call it a soul! (*To the Venus.*) My beauty, here's Hebe coming to see you—Bert's girl. (*Roars with laughter.*)

[*Knock on door, which is audible only in a pause in his mirth. He turns.*

Come in.

[STELLA *enters, pausing just inside. She is timid, but not confused. They look at one another an instant.* TRENT'S *tone as he speaks to her is no longer harsh, though a little ironical.*

TRENT: Bert's girl?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

[TRENT *stands regarding her a moment, then comes to the throne chair and pushes it a little more down stage.*

TRENT: Sit down—there.

STELLA (*glancing back uncertainly*): But I—I've brought up your supper.

TRENT: The deuce—I'd forgotten it.

[STELLA *goes out, to return with a tray on which is a simple meal. She comes to table and begins to arrange the things on it.*

I'll do that. Sit down.

STELLA: But——(*Nonplussed, stands near table hesitating.*)

[TRENT *waves her aside and she sits, somewhat timidly, glancing at him wonderingly.* TRENT *sits down to his supper.* STELLA *looks down at her hands in her lap.* TRENT *regards her very much as he would regard an interesting curio.*

TRENT (*suddenly*): Where do you come from?

[STELLA *starts a little, but* TRENT'S *look and manner are reassuring if the tone is abrupt.*

STELLA: Margate, sir.

TRENT: How old are you?

STELLA: Twenty.

TRENT: Always been at Margate?

STELLA: No, sir. I used to live in London—at Kennington—(*pauses, but as* TRENT *seems to be waiting for more, she goes on*) but when father died, mother went to Margate to let lodgings.

TRENT (*as if ticking off items in an inventory*): Lodging-house at Margate. How do you like that?

STELLA: I'm not there now, sir. Mother died two years ago and I took a situation.

TRENT: A situation.—What sort?

STELLA: A cashier—in a shop.

TRENT: What shop?

STELLA: A grocer's—Mr. Handley's.

TRENT: A grocer's.—Do you like that?

STELLA: It was all right—they were very kind. Mrs. Handley used to know mother in London.

TRENT: You've left it now?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: Where are you now then?

STELLA: I've left Margate. I'm going to work in London.

TRENT: Where?

STELLA: Bert got me a place.

TRENT (*sharply*): Bert!

STELLA (*timid again, feeling a change in his tone*): Yes, sir.

[*Pause.*

TRENT: And what has—Bert—got for you?

STELLA: I'm going to Blackley's as a clerk.

TRENT: I thought—Bert—was going to marry you?

STELLA: Oh yes, later on. I've got a lot of things to learn first.

TRENT: Learn—what things?

STELLA: I don't know quite yet. But Bert is so clever, you see, and I don't know anything hardly.

TRENT: And is—Bert—going to teach you?

STELLA: Yes, sir. And Iris——

TRENT (*ironically amused*): Iris!

STELLA (*puzzled by his manner*): And Evelyn. Bert says I can learn a lot from them.

[TRENT *pushes away his plate and rises, turning to fire.* STELLA *rises also, convinced that the strange old man is displeased, though she cannot tell why.*

Have you finished, sir?

TRENT: Yes.

[TRENT *makes preparations for some coffee, which he prepares himself.* STELLA *puts supper-things on tray.*

STELLA: Is there anything else I can do, sir?

TRENT (*without turning*): No.

[STELLA *crosses to door.*

Put it down outside and come back—unless Bert wants you.

[*She pauses, surprised.* TRENT *turns and looks at her.*

STELLA: Oh no—not if you want me. He likes me to be useful.

[TRENT *picks up his pipe and chuckles as he lights it.* STELLA *goes out with tray.* TRENT *gets out two cups and saucers from a cupboard.* STELLA *returns and pauses C. uncertainly.*

TRENT (*looking round*): Don't you like that chair?

STELLA: Oh yes, thank you.

TRENT: Then sit down—sit down. (*His tone is now friendly again.*)

[STELLA *obeys.* TRENT *makes coffee and pours out two cups.* STELLA *ventures to give a timid glance or two round the room, which is a very strange place to her eyes.*

Do you like coffee?

STELLA: Thank you. (*Half rises to fetch it.*)

TRENT: Keep where you are. (*He brings her a cup and returns to his chair. He is about to drink his own when suddenly he turns to the telephone which is on the table.*)

Hullo—North West 062. (*Pause.*) Puttock? That you? Trent. Can you look in for a minute? . . . Now. Something to show you. (*Rings off.*)

[*Pause as* TRENT *sips coffee and takes a pull at his pipe, giving attentive glances over at* STELLA.

TRENT (*suddenly*): Where did you meet—Bert?

[TRENT *finds it difficult to say the name of Bert without annoyance, but tries to control it when speaking to* STELLA.

STELLA (*starting a little at the abrupt address*): At Margate, sir.

TRENT: How?

STELLA: At a friend's house.

TRENT: What friend?

STELLA: Lizzie Hope. Her mother keeps a boarding-house.

TRENT: Boarding-house. How did she know—Bert?

STELLA: He lodged there.

TRENT: Bert was a boarder, eh?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: A bit of a swell, eh?

STELLA: He always had one of the best rooms.

TRENT: So you met—Bert—at this boarding-house?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: Did you go there often?

STELLA: Oh no.

TRENT: Why not?

STELLA: It was a very smart place, and I—— (*Stops.*)

TRENT: You——?

STELLA: I couldn't expect to go there much. But Mrs. Hope knew mother, and sometimes she would ask me when they had a party.

TRENT: And it was at a party you met Bert?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: At a party.—Is—Bert—smart?

STELLA: Oh yes.

TRENT: And is that one of the things you've got to learn —how to be smart?

STELLA (*doubtfully*): I—I think so.

TRENT: And will—Bert—teach you?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

[*Pause.* TRENT *rises to get more coffee.*

TRENT: Have some more?

STELLA: No, thank you.

[TRENT *stands before the fire, back to it, drinking his coffee, staring speculatively at* STELLA.

TRENT (*suddenly*): Do you like this room?

STELLA (*startled*): Oh yes, sir.

TRENT: Don't say so if you don't mean it. Never mind saying what you think. (*Indicating the Venus.*) Do you like that?

[STELLA *feeling compelled, after his words, to say what she thinks, and not liking the Venus, is distressed.*

No?

STELLA: N-not very much, sir.

TRENT: You don't? Well, lots of people don't like her either. When you know her better I'll ask you again and we'll see what you'll say then. (*Crosses to the Runner.*) What about this?

STELLA: Yes, sir. (*Trying to say the right thing.*) What—who is it?

TRENT: Gentleman named Hippomenes.

STELLA (*politely*): Oh yes.

TRENT: He lived with gods and goddesses and that made him such a fine fellow. If you were ugly the gods would have nothing to do with you and throw you on the rubbish heap.

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: He's just going to run a race for Atalanta. Do you know who she was?

STELLA: No, sir.

TRENT: There's a picture of her over there—go and look.

[STELLA *obeys.*

Well?

STELLA (*with real admiration*): She's very beautiful.

TRENT: They were a fine-looking couple, eh? She was worth running a race for, and she knew it.

STELLA: Did he get her?

TRENT: Yes. He went to a lot of trouble over it, but she was worth it. Men don't bother to do that sort of thing nowadays, eh? The women aren't so particular. Any little three-halfpenny tallow candle in trousers can get 'em for a whistle. (*Mimicking.*) Tilly-tilly-ducky-darling, come along and be married—and they run to church like flies to a fly trap. (*With sudden fury.*) Bah!

[*He turns disgustedly away and goes R. and relights his pipe. Pause. When he speaks again his voice is normal.*

Do you think Atalanta there would have looked twice at a man with warts and red eyes?

STELLA (*startled and nonplussed*): N-no, sir.

TRENT: Yet I saw a woman as fair as Aphrodite getting married to one the other day.

STELLA: Perhaps—perhaps he was kind——

TRENT (*annoyed*): Kind! Pah! That's no excuse. Nothing is any excuse for filling the world with ugly people. If you

must have a kind man, get some one who hasn't got warts and red eyes.

[*Door bell.*

That's Puttock.

[STELLA *looks doubtfully at* TRENT.

STELLA: Shall I go now, sir?

TRENT: No. Sit there again. (*Indicates throne chair.*)

[TRENT *stares at her attentively, then turns out all the lights save the one that shows up her beauty most.* PUTTOCK *comes in. He is a keen-eyed man of well over middle age. He is careless in dress, a little curt in manner. He is smoking a pipe.*

Come in.

[PUTTOCK *crosses.* STELLA *does not look up.* TRENT *waves his pipe casually in her direction.* PUTTOCK *looks at her, then comes up to table.*

Have some coffee?

[*Picks up milk-jug.* STELLA *jumps up and comes C.*

STELLA: You'll want some more milk—shall I get——

TRENT: Yes, please. By the way, what is your name? What are you besides Bert's girl?

STELLA: Stella—Stella Marsh.

TRENT: Very well. (*Introducing.*) Miss Marsh—Mr. Puttock.

PUTTOCK (*as they shake hands*): Bit cold outside, eh?

STELLA: Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

[*Pause.*

TRENT: Well?

PUTTOCK: Nice piece that.

TRENT: Hebe—eh?

PUTTOCK: Handmaiden of the gods.

TRENT: No—of Bert.

PUTTOCK: What? (*Laughs.*)

TRENT: She's—Bert's girl.

PUTTOCK: Is he also a connoisseur?

TRENT: Picked her up at Margate; price—one leer and two kisses.

PUTTOCK: Cheap. Well, what are you going to do with her?

TRENT: She's Bert's—don't you hear?

[*Door bell.*

Who the devil—— It might be Quinton. You've met him, I think.

PUTTOCK: Believe so—sort of parson, ain't he? What's he got to do with you then?

TRENT: He bought an old Flemish crucifix once—lovely little thing it was, too—I can see him coming in for it now—when I was at the shop—tall thin boy of a chapel parson.

PUTTOCK: Chapel! Good lord!

TRENT: Hung it in his room—till the chapel kicked up a fuss.

PUTTOCK: Throw him out?

TRENT: No—he hid it.

[*Knock on door.*

Come in.

[QUINTON *enters. He is as* TRENT *has said. He is eager and sometimes excitable in manner. He is not at all aggressively of the chapel—the round collar is the only symbol. He hesitates on seeing* PUTTOCK.

QUINTON: I shan't be in the way?

TRENT: Shouldn't ask you if you would. You've met, Puttock says.

QUINTON: Yes, I'm sure we have. (*Crosses quickly and impulsively shakes hands with* PUTTOCK.)

TRENT: Smoking? (*Offers cigarettes.*)

QUINTON: Thanks. I'm glad I found you in, Trent.

TRENT: What's the trouble—all the swans turning back into geese?

QUINTON (*smilingly*): I sometimes think so. It's hard work. (*Looking round.*) It's good to come here and look at things of beauty.

[PUTTOCK *is seated, but* QUINTON *wanders round.*

TRENT: I've added to my collection.

QUINTON (*eagerly*): What is it?

[STELLA *returns with the required milk.* TRENT *gets out a couple more cups and prepares coffee. As* STELLA *crosses,* QUINTON *looks at her with interest and admiration.*

TRENT (*to* STELLA): Thank you. Please don't wait any longer.

[*She goes.* QUINTON *comes down and opens door for her. Not used to such formal politenesses, she is a little embarrassed and hurries out.*

(*As* QUINTON *returns to table*): Well, what do you think of it?

[*Coffee is passed round.*

QUINTON: What?

TRENT: The "Hebe."

QUINTON: Hebe—where—— (*Looks round eagerly.*)

TRENT: Glad to see you treated her with the respect due to a goddess. (*Chuckles.*)

QUINTON (*realising*): That beautiful girl?

TRENT: Hebe—the handmaiden of the gods——

PUTTOCK: At present staying in London.

QUINTON: Who is she?

TRENT (*watching* QUINTON): She's going to marry—Bert!

QUINTON (*with involuntary contempt*): Bert!

TRENT (*chuckling*): Exactly.

PUTTOCK: I'm curious to see this Bert.

[QUINTON, *surprised into his expression of contempt, attempts to retract, being a persistent optimist.*

QUINTON: Of course, Bert is a well-meaning chap; he's——

TRENT (*impatiently*): For the Lord's sake, man, don't eat your words. You know what he is well enough.

QUINTON: But the very fact that he's made such a choice —such a fine type of girl——

PUTTOCK: The unfit seeking to rejuvenate itself by means of the fit.

TRENT (*excitedly*): There you have it. There you have it. Nature again—damn her. But she shan't do it—if I have my way.

PUTTOCK: Nature puts up a pretty good fight.

TRENT: We'll see.

QUINTON: What can you do?

TRENT: Stop it.

QUINTON: Stop what?

PUTTOCK (*chuckling*): The rejuvenation of the unfit.

QUINTON: But you can't interfere—you oughtn't to do so. It might mean the remaking of—of Bert.

TRENT: Who wants him remade? I don't.

QUINTON (*warmly*): I do. Even Bert has a soul.

TRENT: A soul! Twenty Berts together have one soul between them and that's spotted. Let him die out—let all Berts die out.

QUINTON: You speak as if he were a monster. After all, he's only——

TRENT (*interrupting fiercely*): While after all he's—commonplace. The commonplace of filth. Commonplace if it's clean is all very well—makes a good foundation for something better. The commonplace of filth is a rotten thing. Nothing decent can be built upon it. I grant you Bert wouldn't steal—except by way of business. Bert wouldn't murder. Bert wouldn't run off with another man's wife—it wouldn't pay him. Bert only commits the vices that allow him to keep inside the circle of respectability. And for these negative virtues we call him—save the mark—a good citizen——

QUINTON (*vainly trying to interrupt*): But—Trent——

TRENT (*ignoring him, and thumping the table vigorously*): I say he's a damnably bad citizen. It's his narrow, dirty, slimy little mind that keeps the world so close to the muckheap. Give me two big sinners rather than a score of these

mud-rats. The sinner may by luck breed a saint, but a mud-rat only breeds more mud-rats, and—the gods help us—the world is overrun with 'em already. The sinner may know a goddess when he sees one (QUINTON *again tries to interrupt.* TRENT *turns on him*)—but your Bert only chucks her under the chin. He doesn't know what beauty is—except for lust; loveliness of form is a subject for lewdness; loveliness of mind a subject for jeers. Idealism—imagination—he never heard of them, and the only time he sees visions (*laughing harshly*) is when he's drunk, and then they're unspeakable.

QUINTON: This is altogether unfair, Trent. You——

[TRENT *has turned away; now he turns back again on* QUINTON, *interrupting.*

TRENT: You say that girl is a beautiful creature. Do you want to see her used for the perpetuation of a race of Berts?

PUTTOCK (*with a laugh*): She might improve the breed.

TRENT (*turning to him quickly*): The world can't afford the risk. Let ugliness mate with ugliness and beauty with beauty.

PUTTOCK: Then Bert shall have——

TRENT: The girl with the warts.

[PUTTOCK *laughs loudly.*

QUINTON: Who?

PUTTICK: The maid downstairs. (*Laughs again.*)

TRENT: Goddesses are not for such as Bert.

QUINTON: Yet the goddess chose him——

TRENT: Chose him? (*Disgustedly.*) Chose him? (*To* PUTTOCK.) Do you hear him?

PUTTOCK: Probably the first chap to make love to her.

TRENT: There's the poor little fool, stuck away to look after herself, with nobody to care whether she gets hold of a satyr or an Apollo, a Don Juan or a Sir Galahad. There's Nature—good, kind, loving Mother Nature that you're so devoted to, urging her on to mate almost before she's out of socks. There's Bert—the all-conquering male, also urged on to mate by the same kind maternal spirit. There you have

it—the whole comedy, farce, tragedy—as you will. You can see it being played any day. Take away Bert, and within a year there'll possibly be Sidney or Percy or Edwin, and each time the poor fool thinks she's choosing the ideal. Nature won't help her; it's time somebody else had a try.

QUINTON: You're unfair to the Berts——

TRENT: And you're unfair to the Stellas.

QUINTON: I can only act as far as I can see, and it seems to me——

TRENT: It's a pity you can see only such a little way.

PUTTOCK: Time, gentlemen, time!

[QUINTON, *no whit offended by* TRENT'S *brusquerie, laughs, and then speaks more lightly.*

QUINTON: Well, how are you going to stop it?

TRENT: Buy her.

PUTTOCK: *Buy* her?

TRENT: I can buy anything downstairs. (*Chuckles.*)

PUTTOCK: Give us details.

TRENT: She shall be my slave, my cup-bearer—and I'll pay for her in good solid cash.

QUINTON: Supposing she won't agree?

TRENT: She'll do as Bert tells her.

QUINTON: Well, there you are; if he has so much influence, what can you do——?

TRENT: He has—at present—at present. Wait. It's his turn now. Wait.

PUTTOCK: What exactly are you going to do?

TRENT: I don't know.

PUTT: Ten to one you don't pull it off.

TRENT: Right.—But the stake isn't fitting. Now then—that Venetian goblet of yours——

PUTTOCK: No, I don't!

TRENT: You're afraid you'll lose. Back your fancy.

PUTTOCK: My ebony casket against that old missal you picked up the other day.

TRENT: Done.

QUINTON: It's all wrong, you know. Have you forgotten there's such a thing as instinct? Trust——

TRENT: Instinct! (*Disgusted.*) Oh, throw him out. The devil's got instincts.

QUINTON (*moving as if to go*): Well, it's no use arguing with you—now.

TRENT: What's the hurry?

QUINTON: I've got my evening class—of Berts, you would perhaps say.

TRENT: Good Lord—drown them!

QUINTON: I really called in to see if you had something I could give as a prize—something small, of course—inexpensive—— (*Glances round.*)

TRENT: Prize for what—good conduct?

QUINTON (*smiling*): No. I've set them an essay to write, and I thought you might find me something suitable for a prize for the best.

TRENT: What's the subject? I won't let you have anything for a yarn about—instinct.

QUINTON: The essay is on "The Function of Art in Daily Life."

TRENT: Make one of 'em live it for a year and I'll give him my Venus.

PUTTOCK: What about the new Hebe?

TRENT: Good. Splendid. He'd be worth her. Now's your chance, Mr. Parson. Pick me out a nice-looking, clean-living, honest lad from your hundred and one classes and I'll pit him against—Bert. Now!

QUINTON: I won't interfere. I daren't.

TRENT: Well, well—run along and sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and mind it's in tune. I'll look out a good little prize for the best boy.

QUINTON: Thanks. (*Crosses L.*)

PUTTOCK: I must get along also.

TRENT (*to* PUTTOCK): You've put your money on Bert, eh?

PUTTOCK: No, on human nature.

TRENT (*with a laugh*): Well, you've never seen Bert.

PUTTOCK: No.

TRENT: You'd enjoy the fun more if you had. I'll get him up here some time, though he'll be shocked. He always is.

PUTTOCK (*crossing L.*): Shocked? At you, or me, or both?

TRENT (*chuckling*): Venus. He's very proper, is Bert. He looks shocked with one eye and slings the other round to peep. Good night.

[PUTTOCK *and* QUINTON *go.* TRENT *paces the room quickly for a few turns, puffing away at his pipe, deep in thought. Then he stops and rings bell. After a short pause* STELLA *opens door.*

Come in and sit down.

[STELLA *comes to the throne chair again.*

This situation that Bert has got for you—do you like it?

STELLA: I don't know—I haven't been yet.

TRENT: Do you want to go to it?

STELLA (*hesitating, puzzled*): I—I don't know. I must go somewhere.

TRENT: You want to earn money?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: Earn it here.

[*She looks at him, surprised.*

You can help me—keep the place tidy instead of that pimples girl—dust—write letters—do anything I want. Would you do it?

STELLA: Oh yes—if I could. Only——

TRENT: What?

STELLA: Bert——

TRENT: What about Bert?

STELLA: He got me the other place.

TRENT: What's that got to do with it?

STELLA: Perhaps he would rather I went there——

TRENT: I'll settle with him. How much money were you going to get?

STELLA: Thirty-five shillings.

TRENT: I'll make it fifty.

STELLA: Oh, thank you.

TRENT: But mind, you'll have to do as I tell you. When I go out I may often leave you in charge. You're not to let anybody from downstairs come near. You understand?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: If you don't like the job you can give it up. Don't mope or fret or whine. I won't have anything near me that's puling and melancholy—one ugly thing here is enough, and that's myself. The gods have favoured you; put a high value on yourself. Don't let anyone—*anyone*—or anything cheapen you. If you do, the gods will have vengeance. Remember, what this lop-sided, screeching, overcrowded old world wants more than anything else is beauty, so give it all you can. Now, go downstairs and ask Mrs. Walters and—Bert—to step up for a moment, if they will be so good.

[STELLA *is rather bewildered by the harangue and also by the abrupt finish and the message. She goes hastily.* TRENT *pauses before the Runner.*

Well, my handsome pagan, what are the odds? She isn't an Atalanta—nothing more, perhaps, than a compound of the homely virtues in a handsome casket. A Penelope; and they're the devil for meekness. (*Turns away laughing and rubbing his hands.*) Good Lord, if I was anything but a one-eyed Caliban I'd try a fall with Bert myself.

[*Some one has turned the handle of the door, and now suddenly the door flies open and* MRS. WALTERS *is precipitated into it with* BERT *close behind and* STELLA *bringing up the rear.*

BERT: Now then, mater, what did I tell you? Hullo, Uncle, how are we?

[BERT *always raises his voice as if* TRENT *were deaf.*

TRENT (*bowing with mock gravity*): We are very well.

MRS. WALTERS: I'm so sorry, Uncle, we came in without knocking.

BERT: I did knock, but nobody can hear anything when your tongue is going. (*To* TRENT.) She didn't want us to come in because she thought she heard you talking to somebody.

TRENT: So I was.

MRS. WALTERS: There, Bert, what did I tell you? We oughtn't to have interrupted.

TRENT (*indicating the Runner*): I was talking to him. He is a great friend of mine.

[*They all turn and gaze at the statue.*

BERT (*once more rising to what he considers a situation*): A friend of yours? Oh yes, of course. Introduce me, won't you?

TRENT (*elaborately*): Hippomenes—Bert.

[STELLA, *mystified by the various aspects of* TRENT *she has seen, sensing the mockery in his tone now, and feeling rather unhappy, tries to check* BERT'S *exuberance, but to no purpose.*

BERT (*bowing to statue*): Pleased to meet you. A bit of a racing johnny, eh? Hundred and fifty on the track.

TRENT: And he won.

BERT: Good egg. Any stakes?

TRENT: A lady.

BERT: A lady! I say, Uncle, they knew a thing or two in those days, what? (*Laughs knowingly, and* TRENT *echoes the laugh.*) It isn't like that nowadays, eh? It's the other way round. The girls run after the men. (*Puts his arm round* STELLA.) She knows something about it, don't you, old girl? What about——

[TRENT *moves suddenly.*

TRENT (*to* STELLA *peremptorily*): Come here. (STELLA *leaves* BERT.) Did you tell them?

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT (*to them all*): Sit down.

[MRS. WALTERS *sits near door.* BERT *lounges towards the throne chair.*

TRENT (*harshly*): Not that! (*To* STELLA, *his voice at once softening.*) That's yours. (STELLA *sits.*)

BERT: All right, Uncle; anywhere'll do for me. (*Takes another seat and gets out his cigarettes. To* TRENT.) You don't object?

[TRENT *offers him a box of cigars.*

Ta—don't mind if I do.

[TRENT *goes to fire-place, standing with his back to it.*

TRENT (*indicating* STELLA): I want to buy her.

[STELLA *is bewildered.* MRS. WALTERS, *more than ever assured the old man is crazy, is only anxious to accommodate him.* BERT *is for once startled out of his nonchalance and pauses in the act of lighting his cigar.*

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, yes, Uncle—we understand, don't we, Bert? So does Stella, don't you, dear? That will be quite all right. You mean you want her to wait on you —yes.

TRENT (*staring at* MRS. WALTERS): Always.

MRS. WALTERS (*soothingly*): Yes, yes, of course. Stella will, won't you, dear?

STELLA: Oh yes.

BERT: But you can't buy ladies without money, you know, Uncle, and this one belongs to me, and she's rather expensive.

STELLA (*hastily*): But—but that's all settled—I told you——

BERT: Settled? I don't think so. How much was it to be?

TRENT: Fifty shillings.

BERT: Oh, come off it, Uncle. That's too cheap—private secretary, parlourmaid, housemaid——

MRS. WALTERS: No, no, Bert, she won't be that——

BERT (*ignoring her*): All that for fifty bob. Make it three quid.

TRENT: Fifty—bob!

MRS. WALTERS: Uncle is quite right—fifty shillings a week to start with, of course (*trying to make signs to* BERT *to agree*).

BERT: Well, all I can say is, it's dirt cheap. Your friend Mr. Hippo there paid more in his day, I bet.

TRENT (*inexorably*): Fifty shillings.

BERT: All right. Done.

TRENT: In advance.

[TRENT *turns and goes up L. into his bedroom.* BERT *laughs noiselessly and touches his forehead significantly.*

MRS. WALTERS: You were silly, Bert, to go on at him like that.

BERT: He can hold on to the boodle, the old lunatic, can't he?

MRS. WALTERS: People often do when they're mad. It takes them all sorts of ways. How you kept on at him—I thought he'd cut it down. I thought you had more sense.

BERT: All right—shut up. It's done now. (*To* STELLA.) It's up to you, old girl, to make it more. He's got pots of money. Just you look out while you're up here and get what you can. And if ever he wants to give you anything, don't you say No.

MRS. WALTERS: Of course she wouldn't; she's got some sense, haven't you, dear?

BERT: He's got things up here worth any amount, though you wouldn't think it to look at them. (*Saunters round.*) How's this, eh? (*Picks up a statuette.* STELLA *touches his arm.*) No, you mustn't look—it'd make you blush. He must have a nice mind, he must, to keep things like this about him. I shall have to keep my eye on you, Stell, I can see, or you'll get too goey.

STELLA (*imploringly*): Put it down, Bert.

BERT: I'm not hurting it, am I? and the old Johnny isn't here.

STELLA: He wouldn't like you to touch it—nobody must touch them, he told me.

BERT (*unheeding*): No wonder he won't let anybody come up here—it's hardly decent.

MRS. WALTERS: Two pound ten a week—that will be very nice for you, dear.

STELLA: Yes.

MRS. WALTERS: And you living with us downstairs. You'll have no fares or anything.

[BERT *puts down statuette.*

BERT: What made him fix on fifty bob? You didn't say anything to him about what you were going to get at Blackleys, did you?

STELLA: Yes, he asked me.

MRS. WALTERS: Did he really? Well, there, how artful!

BERT: And you told him? You should have said you didn't know and left it to me, and I'd have got him up to three quid easy. You want smartening up, old thing, doesn't she? I must take you in hand, I can see, or the old lunatic——

MRS. WALTERS: H'sh!—he's coming.

[TRENT *comes down C. and holds out envelope to* STELLA.

STELLA: Thank you. (*Rises.* MRS. WALTERS *also rises.*)

MRS. WALTERS: I'm sure, Uncle, she is very much obliged to you, and will do her best to make you comfortable, won't you, Stella? Now you'll want to rest; you must be so tired.

TRENT (*staring at her*): No more warts!

MRS. WALTERS: No—no.

TRENT: No more pimples!

MRS. WALTERS: No—no.

BERT: Warts—pimples—what's all this, eh?

MRS. WALTERS: It's Daisy—Uncle doesn't like her. We all have some people we don't like, don't we, Uncle, I'm sure.

BERT: Daisy? Why, I call her a good-looking girl. (*Puts his arm round* STELLA.) I'm glad you admire my taste, Uncle.

TRENT (*abruptly*): Go away—I want to be alone.

BERT: Right you are. Tootle-oo and pleasant dreams.

[MRS. WALTERS *hurries L.*

Don't run, mater, or you'll suffocate yourself. Come on, Stell.

TRENT: I want her.

BERT: When you've finished, Stell, we'll go for a walk.

MRS. WALTERS: Now, Bert, come on——

BERT: Now, mater——

[MRS. WALTERS *and* BERT *go out.* STELLA *stands waiting.*

TRENT (*in his normal kindly tone*): I make my own breakfast. But be up here by ten o'clock.

STELLA: Yes, sir.

TRENT: That's all. (*She turns to go.*) Good night, Hebe.

[*She smiles a little timidly in response to his smile.*

STELLA: Good night, sir. (*Exit.*

[TRENT *goes up to the Runner.*

TRENT: Well, Mr. Hippo, what do you think of it all?

CURTAIN.

Title

Author

Accession No.

Call No.

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

ACT III

Title [redacted]

Author [redacted]

Accession No. [redacted]

Call No. [redacted]

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

Title [redacted]

Author [redacted]

Accession No. [redacted]

Call No. [redacted]

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

ACT III

TRENT'S *room, as in Act II: some weeks later. Evening. The room is in darkness.* STELLA *enters. She crosses to fire and draws up a chair before it. She is wearing a pretty though inexpensive frock—her " best " frock, for there is company downstairs. She has hurried in, almost panting, and now as she sits before the fire she looks round as one who has found a haven.* TRENT *comes in up L. He is wearing a dressing-gown, and—as is seen when he turns up the lights —he is looking worn and ill.* STELLA *springs up on his entrance.*

STELLA: I—I thought you had gone out. I—I'm so sorry. (*Moves as if to leave the room.*)

TRENT: Stop. (*Comes down stage, looking at her curiously.*) Sit down. You needn't run away.

STELLA (*still doubtful*): I've never come up here before when you were out unless you had left me some work to do —I didn't mean to do what you wouldn't like—I'm so sorry——

TRENT (*waving his hand impatiently as he goes to his own chair*): Don't fuss. Sit down. Come up here whenever you want to. Haven't I said so? If I didn't want you I'd tell you so.

[STELLA *sits, then noting* TRENT'S *ill appearance and evident suffering, she rises impulsively.*

STELLA: You——?

TRENT: Well—what is it?

STELLA: You're ill.

TRENT: Rotten. But you can't do anything, so don't fuss.

STELLA (*disregarding this*): It's your head again. I'm sure I could do something to help.

TRENT: Cut it off. Throw it to the dogs. No good.

[STELLA *comes up to table, anxiously regarding him.* TRENT *puts his hands to his head and waggles it, laughing as he does so.*

It's not only ugly, but it won't work. What a muddle they made of it. (*Drops his hands.*) "And did the hand of the potter shake?" (*Turns to get his pipe, then settles back in his chair.*) Did you ever think who made you? (*Sharply.*) Don't tell me "God."

STELLA: No.

TRENT: You used to think so.

STELLA: I don't know——

TRENT: Yes, you did. Why don't you now?

STELLA (*helplessly*): I—I don't know what to think.

TRENT: Awful responsibility, making people, though you wouldn't think so the way they go about it. Make something hideous, and then instead of being ashamed of it they put the blame on the Almighty. (*Pause.*) My father was a consumptive and my mother an epileptic. But did that stop them doing their bit? Not at all. And the devil alone knows the crowd there'd have been of us if they had had time. But consumptive father coming home drunk and trying to hit epileptic mother, missed her, fell and broke his head and died. So there was a lucky escape for little Fanny and Sarah and George and the rest. And when I fell about on my sticks of legs and grew up ugly and spotted and my eyes bulged and my head cracked, did anyone say I ought to have been smothered at birth? Not they. They all sat round and crooned: "Poor dear Mrs. Trent, what a burden the Lord has put upon you, and how beautifully you bear it!" (*Laughs loudly and harshly at his own words, then suddenly turns on* STELLA *and speaks in his normal kindly tone.*)

TRENT: Well, what do you make of all that?

STELLA: I don't know what to think—it's all so different——

TRENT: They didn't say such things to you at Margate?

STELLA: No.

TRENT: And they don't say them to you downstairs?

STELLA (*looking away from his keen quizzical glance*): No——

TRENT: Bert—for instance. (*Pause.*) But then, of course, I'm mad.

STELLA (*diffidently*): Why do you pretend you are mad?

TRENT: Pretend? (*With affected surprise.*) But I am mad; ask Bert.

STELLA (*looking away again*): You only pretend.

TRENT: Is that what—Bert—says?

[*Pause; then* STELLA, *embarrassed by the baiting in* TRENT'S *tone and words, rises.*

TRENT: Where are you going?

STELLA: I must go back to the others.

TRENT: Rot. What did you come up for?

STELLA: To sit here for a little. But I——

TRENT: Then stop here. I'm going out.—Yes, I was going. I don't tell polite lies. I'm going round to Puttock for a few minutes. Tell Quinton if he comes in. You are to stop up here as long as you like. (*Rises.*) What's going on downstairs?

STELLA: There's a party——

TRENT: And you didn't want a party, eh?

STELLA: I—I'm tired. It's so nice here.

TRENT (*resting his hand a moment on her shoulder as he passes her*): Come whenever you like. (*Exit up L.*)

[STELLA *picks up a book from the table and sits in the throne chair. Then after a second or so lets the book lie open on the table and sits staring before her, thoughtful. A knock on the door.* QUINTON *comes in.* STELLA *rises.*

QUINTON: Good evening. Don't let me disturb you—please.

STELLA: Mr. Trent is expecting you.

QUINTON: I am a little early.

STELLA: I don't think it matters. He will be here in a minute or two. He hasn't been well, and is in his room.

QUINTON: I'm sorry. Perhaps I'd better not wait.

STELLA: Oh yes. He told me he was expecting you. I'll tell him you're here. He's getting ready to go to Mr. Puttock's.

QUINTON: Please don't. I'll just sit here till he comes out. You're not going, Miss Marsh?

STELLA: Yes—I——

QUINTON: Don't go or I shall think I'm in the way. Did Mr. Trent show you my boys' essays?

STELLA: Yes.

QUINTON: Did you like them? I thought they were splendid.

STELLA: I couldn't understand all of them, but they were very clever.

QUINTON: Fine fellows, Miss Marsh, whatever Mr. Trent may say. What did he think of the essays?

STELLA: He said they were—I don't quite know how to put it.

QUINTON: You're trying to break it to me gently. I believe I can guess what he said. Never mind. We understand him, don't we? But really, you know those boys of mine are wonderful. When I think of what they have written—the ideas—the aspirations—and then remember from what so many of the boys come!

STELLA (*all sympathy*): Are their homes so dreadful?

QUINTON: In the case of one of them especially, yes. In the case of all, lack of sympathy, surroundings utterly devoid of ideals. What people so lack is opportunity. So many have potentialities for good, for beauty, and they never get a chance to develop them.

STELLA: And you are giving these boys a chance! It is good of you.

QUINTON: No credit to me. It's a simple duty. It's the duty of everyone who sees a fellow-creature needing help and encouragement to give it. Don't you think so?

STELLA (*thoughtfully*): Yes—of course.

[TRENT, *coming in up R., pauses.*

QUINTON: People mean well—we all mean well—and we fall so far short of what we mean, don't we?

STELLA: Yes. (*Turns away slightly, staring before her.*)

[TRENT *speaks suddenly, harshly.*

TRENT: Hymn No. 525.

[STELLA *and* QUINTON *start and turn.* TRENT *comes down C. between them.* STELLA *goes out L. quickly.*

Let us sing—a chant of damnation for the people who mean well. (*He chants in a cracked harsh voice.*)

And the Lord said, Take me these people who always mean well and never—do—it;

And cast them into the bottomless pit—for—ever—and ever.

And a threefold Amen.

[QUINTON *listens to this outburst with kindly tolerance.*

QUINTON: You've frightened Miss Marsh away.

TRENT: She's heard worse things than that. (*With sudden anger.*) You and your beastly doctrines—what do you mean by it? You'll make her believe in Bert after all.

QUINTON (*astonished*): Bert!

TRENT (*the anger dying as quickly as it had risen*): Bert. Had you forgotten him?

[QUINTON *turns away, uneasy.* TRENT *looks after him maliciously.*

TRENT: Do you think—Bert—means well, eh?

QUINTON (*goaded to a defence which, however, is only lukewarm*): I'm sure he does. I saw him just now as I came in, and I thought——

TRENT (*interrupting*): Where did you see him? Did you have a talk?

QUINTON: I only passed him in the street. He was with some friends, just going out, I imagine. I thought——

TRENT: Round to the pub, no doubt. Then when he's drunk and amorous he'll come in and kiss—Hebe. And she'll wipe her mouth, and, remembering your sermon, she'll tell herself that—Bert—means well, in spite of all. (*Pause.*) So, you've seen Bert again. Made in the image of his Maker, eh? Shocking libel, let us hope.

QUINTON (*hotly*): You know I don't hold that doctrine.

TRENT: My mistake—you're an evolutionist. Man wasn't made to a model but is to work to one. Well, let Hebe help you. Let her marry Bert all in the good cause. And they'll have four children if—Bert—can afford it, and three will be like Bert, let's say, and one like Hebe. How's that for correcting the proportion of good and evil?

QUINTON (*wearily*): It's a difficult problem. And it's no use arguing with you, Trent, so let's leave it. Have you got my——

TRENT (*ignoring the suggestion*): But she isn't going to do it. No. She isn't going to marry Bert.

QUINTON (*quickly*): She's not?

[TRENT *exhibits every sign of delight, poking* QUINTON *in the ribs, slapping Hippomenes on the shoulder, chuckling.*

TRENT: No, no! She's running away from him. She comes up here—for a refuge. Think of that, Hippo, my boy, as our dear young friend Bert would say. She prefers Hippo; she prefers the poor mad old Nunky, Bert, my snail, my slug! (*He becomes suddenly calm and speaks normally again.*) I found her up here to-night when she thought I was out. Come in to rest, she said.

QUINTON: Poor girl!

TRENT: And not the first time. She makes the work last out—Lord knows, there isn't much—she doesn't want to go back there. Now then, parson, two A.B.C. buns to a stick of chocolate she won't marry Bert. Oh, but of course you don't gamble—only in souls. Well, then, let me have one of your boys for my Hebe.

QUINTON (*expostulating*): Trent!

[TRENT *goes to table and picks out a paper from a little pile of MSS.*)

TRENT: Here—this one will do. The one with the most sense.

QUINTON (*looking over the MSS. with eager interest*): That one? You think that the best essay? (*Surprised and a little disappointed.*)

TRENT: The rest are parrots. This chap seems to have an ounce of original thought. What's he like?

QUINTON: But I'm so surprised. He's a dear good boy, of course, but he can't express himself; he's clumsy.

TRENT: I didn't promise a prize for pretty phrases. What's this (*mimicking*) dear good boy like? Hare-lip? Squint? Blotches——?

QUINTON (*smiling*): He's a nice straight boy—a little delicate perhaps——

TRENT: That wouldn't matter so much. The girl isn't. Bring him along and let me see him. If he's all right I'll get the girl up and let them meet.

QUINTON: I couldn't do it. It's—it's repulsive, this mating.

TRENT (*angrily*): What about Bert? There's a mating for you. Is that beautiful?

QUINTON: I can't help it. I can't interfere. That beautiful girl—it's treating her like an animal.

TRENT (*disgusted with him*): So she is—so are you—so's everybody. You're a fool. Come on; let's go round to Puttock's. (*Putting his hand to his head.*) No—I can't—cracked. You go.

QUINTON: Puttock? He won't want me. I'll go home.

TRENT: He's got something you'd like for your pretty parrots. Bring him back with you—I want to see him.

QUINTON: All right. (*Goes to pick up his essays.*)

TRENT: Leave that stuff alone—come in for it on the way back. (*At door.*) She's coming back again. Come out this way. (*They go out up L.*)

[*Pause.* STELLA *returns, but before she can settle down again to her reading the door down L. opens cautiously and* MRS. WALTERS *peeps in.*

MRS. WALTERS (*in a loud whisper*): Stella, are you there?

[STELLA *starts and rises, but before she can get to door* MRS. WALTERS *has come in, closing door behind her.*

He's out. I heard him go down.

STELLA (*uneasily*): Do you want me?

MRS. WALTERS: He won't be back for five minutes, will he? I must sit down; those stairs!

STELLA: What is it—does Bert——?

MRS. WALTERS: I came to see where you'd got to, my dear. I couldn't find you anywhere. You didn't tell anybody you were coming here.

STELLA: I didn't think it would matter.

MRS. WALTERS: Didn't you know Evelyn's been singing? I know she was in a funny temper when she came, but she's all right now, and she's brought her best songs and it's lovely. Mrs. Tatt says she's as good as any concert singer.

STELLA (*evasively*): I had a headache.

MRS. WALTERS: Well, so have I, my dear, but I do my best to make myself pleasant when there's company. I could always give you some eau-de-Cologne or something if you'd come to me.

STELLA: It was nothing very much—I didn't feel like—like a party just then. I wanted to be alone for——

MRS. WALTERS: Then you ought to go to your own room—though I don't like you behaving like this, my dear, I must say. Bert won't like it either. Bert's very sociable, and when he's married he'll have a lot of company, and you must get used to it. But you will. Has Uncle said anything to you about a present?

STELLA: A present?

MRS. WALTERS: A wedding-present. Come, my dear, don't put on those shy airs with me. I expect he will do something handsome. I'm sure he ought to, the money he must have got, and Bert being so good to him, and you working for him.

STELLA: He hasn't said anything about it.

MRS. WALTERS: You mean to say he never talks to you about you being married?

STELLA: No.

MRS. WALTERS: Well, there, but I didn't ought to be surprised, him being what he is. There's Bert now—he'd

like to get married at once. But what I say is—him and me's been having a talk about it—you ought to stop on with Uncle and not say anything about getting married till he does. That's my plan. Now what do you think, my dear?

STELLA: I haven't thought about it. (*Uneasily.*) Don't you think we ought to go down——

MRS. WALTERS: We'll go when I'm ready. You're all in a hurry now, miss, aren't you? They aren't in a hurry downstairs—unless the boys are back—but I expect Edgar is back, anyhow. Didn't I begin to tell you about him and Iris?

STELLA: Did you? I don't remember.

MRS. WALTERS: We arranged to leave them together when he came back. He's awfully gone on Iris, so we thought we'd make ourselves scarce. Eve and Mrs. Tatt have gone into the other room to look at some photos—think of it, my dear, wasn't it artful?—and I came to find you. They'll be engaged by the time we get down, you see if they aren't. They're back—hark at them! (*Listening.*)

[*Distant sounds of voices.*

STELLA (*listening, then speaking anxiously*): They're coming up here!

[MRS. WALTERS *hurries to door and opens it.* STELLA *stands, C.*

MRS. WALTERS: No—they're on the next floor.

[*Sounds come nearer*—BERT *singing.*

Yes—that's Bert—he *is* coming.

[MRS. WALTERS *steps back and* BERT *comes in. He is a little dishevelled. He is in the first stage of tipsiness, happy, unconscious of any rebuff, ready to be gay with anybody.*

BERT (*to* STELLA): Hullo!—there you are.

MRS. WALTERS: Bert, whatever are you thinking of? Come away this minute. (*She goes up to him, but he ignores her.*)

BERT: Stell, old girl, been looking for you everywhere.

MRS. WALTERS (*coming after him as he crosses to* STELLA): You're drunk. Whatever will Uncle say if he catches you up here?

BERT: I'm not drunk—what next! (*To* STELLA, *laughing.*) Always says I'm drunk when I'm happy. (*To* MRS. WALTERS.) Go 'way. Can't you see you're intrudin'? (*To* STELLA.) Want to be alone, don't we?

MRS. WALTERS: Come along, this minute——

BERT (*getting angry*): Get out.

MRS. WALTERS (*holding on to him*): You know what Uncle is—come down at once. Stella will come too, won't you, dear?

[STELLA *makes a move to go, but* BERT *catches hold of her arm.*)

BERT: Hook it, mater, before I throw you out—don't spoil sport. If you won't go, old lady, I'll make you.

[*He releases* STELLA, *and grasping* MRS. WALTERS *by both arms, runs her to the door, she protesting.*

MRS. WALTERS: Oh—you're hurting me!

BERT: Your own fault—you should go quietly, as the bobbies say. You leave me alone—think of your own young days with Papa. (*Pushes her out.*) Au revoir——

[MRS. WALTERS *looks in again.*

MRS. WALTERS: Uncle won't like it.

BERT: Uncle'll be delighted. I'm goin'—stop and see him. (*Pushes her out again.*) Goo'-bye.

STELLA: Bert, let's go down now—I was just coming.

[*Ignoring her words,* BERT *puts his arm round her and looks down at her with foolish triumph.*

BERT: You're a pretty girl, ole thing. Nev'r mind what they say—I say you're a pretty girl and'll make a damned fine woman.

STELLA: We must go——

BERT (*looking round*): Let's sit down.

STELLA (*urgently*): Not here—downstairs.

BERT: Where's chair? We'll stop up here. (*Sits and tries to draw her on to his knee, but she evades this.*) Can't stand them downstairs. Basil's wife—fine girl, bit on the heavy side, but stuck up. You're the right sort, you are. If ever you get stuck up I'll divorce you. Incompa'ability of temper—that's what I'll do. (*Laughs.*) But you won't.

STELLA (*anxiously*): Mr. Trent might come.

BERT: He won't mind—jolly ole chap, really. People afraid of him. I'm not. Not 'fraid of anybody. Don't you be afraid of Nunky. You've played the game all ri'—clever little girl. He likes you. He'll do somethin' handsome for us. He's rich—as rich as Crees—Creesh—Creek—what the devil's the name of the ole bird? Does he ever talk to you about his money?

STELLA: No—no, never.

BERT: Don't you ever see his bank books? I'd like to know how much the ole chap's got——

STELLA: I don't have anything to do with his money.

BERT: He's a close fish, but he's rich. It's time he did somethin' for us. We'll get married—ole girl—we'll do it soon—sooner the better. I'll tell Nunky to-night.

STELLA: You mustn't. Oh, do come away——

BERT: And he'll say blesh you, my children, and stump up. Buy us a house, eh? and give us a few hundred down. That would be all ri'. You ought to talk to him, ole girl.

STELLA: I wish you wouldn't think so much of it—I'm sure he won't do anything——

BERT: What! Nothing! You're wrong, ole thing—you don't know him as I do. I'll talk to him. Why, he's rich—as rich as Creesh—Creeshus. That's the old devil's name—got it. (*Gazing round.*) Look at all this stuff—worth pots of tin.

[STELLA *slips from his hold and he rises.*

Dirty ole stuff, but worth pots. (*Tries to catch her again, but she evades him.*) What you up to, eh? Want me to catch you? Naughty little thing—I'll have you.

[STELLA *stops, and he seizes her.*

STELLA (*urging him towards door*): Come with me—please.

BERT: Cer'ainly—come anywhere with you, ole girl. Give me a kiss. Hippo, ole sport, do you see this? Bit of all ri'——

STELLA (*trying to free herself*): There's some one—they're coming——

BERT: Let 'em all come—I'm afraid of nobody.

[*She cannot release herself.* TRENT *suddenly comes in up L. In his surprise* BERT *relaxes his hold and* STELLA *springs away, her eyes apologetically on* TRENT. *But* TRENT'S *whole mocking attention is given to* BERT.

Hullo, Nunky!

TRENT: Bert! This is an unexpected pleasure.

STELLA: We were just going. (*Attempts to lead* BERT *away.*)

BERT: Lemme alone. I'm goin' to stop and talk to Nunky.

TRENT: Of course you are. We haven't had a talk for a long time. Come and sit down.

[BERT *sits, stumbling a little as he goes to chair.*

BERT: Bit dizzy—hot room. You haven't got a drink anywhere, eh? That'd do me all right.

TRENT: Certainly. Certainly. (*Hurries to cupboard.*)

STELLA: Don't—please—— (*He ignores her.*)

[STELLA *again tries to get* BERT *to leave.*

BERT: Lemme alone, ole girl——

TRENT (*bringing drinks*): You're a man, aren't you, and can look after yourself.

BERT: I should think I am. Nice girl, Stell, but a bit slow. Doesn't understand men—but a fine girl.

TRENT: Oh yes, a very fine girl. And she's your girl.

[TRENT *pours out drink, and takes a malicious pleasure in watching its effects on* BERT.

BERT: She's very fond of her old Bertie. A bit shy—but I don't like 'em free—not to marry, eh? We don't marry that sort.

TRENT: Of course not—never know where you are.

BERT: Don't let her hear—Stell.

TRENT: No, no—just between man and man.

BERT: Women awful nuisance, Nunk—too good or too bad. But you can't get on without 'em. I'm a devil for the women, I am——

TRENT: A regular Don Juan. Anybody can see that.

BERT: Eh? (*Laughing.*) Yes—reg'lar Don Juan—awful chap. But don't tell my ole girl——

TRENT: Shouldn't think of it—she wouldn't understand—that's the worst of these good women.

BERT: That's it—you've got it, Nunk. Always said you were a good sort. Women are'n 'fernal nuisance—but we must have 'em. (*Points to Venus.*) You've got the ri' sort up here. She's a fine woman.

TRENT: Oh, very (*laughs knowingly*)—and never talks.

BERT (*laughing*): Goo! Never talks!

[*They laugh after each description.*

TRENT: Never nags!

BERT: Never nags!

TRENT: Never asks questions.

BERT: Ne'er asks questions.

TRENT: Never spends money.

BERT: Ne'er spends money. Got one for me?

TRENT: But then you're getting married.

BERT: No Venuses when you're married, eh?

TRENT: No, no, no.

BERT: Mustn't be naughty then—not even a week-end. There was a li'l girl once—you know sort——

[STELLA, *who has watched all this with great uneasiness, now comes up again.*

STELLA: Bert——

BERT: Hullo!—you still there, ole girl? Sit down. (*Tries to get hold of her and draw her to his knee.*) Nunky won't mind——

STELLA (*resisting him*): We must go back—the people downstairs—what will they think——

[PUTTOCK *and* QUINTON *enter. They pause in surprise at the scene.* BERT *is now very drunk, having had drink upon drink, and* TRENT *sits watching and leading him on with malicious glee. After taking this in,* PUTTOCK, *with a shrug, goes up stage, but* QUINTON *comes quickly to the little group at table.*

BERT: Damn people downstairs.—Tell 'em go 'way—ev'ybody go 'way—stay with ole Nunky—my girl. (*Gets hold of her.*) Bit of all ri', Nunky—ain't she?—We're goin' to be married——

QUINTON (*indignant*): Trent—can't you stop this——?

BERT (*suddenly realising another person*): Who's that? Friend o' yours, Nunk? Parson—by Gosh! (*Indicating* STELLA *with drunken gravity.*) My girl—we're goin' to be married—give us your bleshin'——

STELLA: Bert——!

TRENT (*suddenly jumping up*): A toast—a toast! Marriage!

QUINTON: Trent—this is devilish! For Heaven's sake, stop——

TRENT (*ignoring him, shouting excitedly*): Marriage! The Union of Mind and Soul and Body, the Symbol of Perfect Unity!

[*Holds up his glass.* BERT *staggers to his feet and raises his glass.*

BERT: That's the way to talk—you and me, ole girl—Marriage—goo' ole Marriage!

[*They clink glasses,* BERT *drinks but* TRENT *throws his down.* BERT *staggers a step or two and falls against the Runner, which in his drunken state he imagines to be* STELLA. *He clings to it.*

QUINTON (*coming to* BERT): Mr. Walters—come, it's time you went to your friends.

BERT (*resenting this*): Lemme alone. She's my girl.

TRENT: You're a man, aren't you?

BERT: Hear, 'ear.

[*He turns from statue, and as* QUINTON *is handy he clings to him for support.*

TRENT: You've arrived at full years of discretion and are ready to take on all the responsibilities of manhood—a wife and children, setting before them your own fine model——

BERT: Hear, 'ear.

[QUINTON *attempts to lead him away.* BERT, *resisting, loses his balance and falls prone.* TRENT *stares down at the huddled muttering figure.*

TRENT: Lord help us!—Is this all we can produce after a billion years?

[MRS. WALTERS *comes in hurriedly, looks round, sees* BERT, *and comes up in great agitation.*

MRS. WALTERS: Bert—whatever are you at? Oh, Uncle, I'm so sorry——!

[TRENT *ignores her. He stands staring still at* BERT, *and then suddenly touches him contemptuously with his foot.*

TRENT (*to* MRS. WALTERS): You made that—that's something to be proud of——!

[STELLA *rushes forward as* TRENT *thus contemptuously dismisses* BERT. *She throws herself beside him and looks up at* TRENT, *distraught.*

STELLA: Don't—don't do that—you're cruel—wicked and cruel.—That isn't the way to help people—you don't understand. Bert—come away—they're only laughing at you, at all of us——

[*She and* MRS. WALTERS *try to get* BERT *up.* QUINTON *attempts to aid them.*

MRS. WALTERS (*scared by* STELLA'S *outburst*): She doesn't mean anything, Uncle—she's a little upset, that's all.

QUINTON: Let me help——

MRS. WALTERS: I'm sure it's very kind——

STELLA: We don't want any help. Come, Bert—let us go, quickly——

[*With all the strength born of excitement she at last gets* BERT *staggering to the door,* MRS. WALTERS *assisting and talking over her shoulder all the time.*

MRS. WALTERS: It's all right, sir, and thank you. You mustn't mind her—she hasn't seen him this way before. It's nothing, really.

[MRS. WALTERS, BERT *and* STELLA *go out.*

MRS. WALTERS (*shouting outside*): Basil—Bas!

[QUINTON *closes door.* PUTTOCK *is sitting R., having watched the scene with detached amusement.* TRENT *is excitedly pacing the room.*

QUINTON (*angrily*): It was diabolical, Trent—horrible.

TRENT: Infernal! I might have known a woman would cling to anything in trousers!

QUINTON: I meant your action was diabolical.

TRENT: I know you did.

QUINTON: The girl was magnificent. The love of woman is past understanding.

TRENT: It is. Beastly.

QUINTON: Unto seventy times seven. Whatever she may have thought of him, she came to his defence. What would the world be without our women and their wonderful protective forgiving love!

PUTTOCK: Shut up! You can see it any night after the pubs are shut.

QUINTON: And a glorious sight it is!

TRENT: Our ideas of glory differ!

QUINTON: They do. Good night. (*Picks up hat.*)

TRENT (*gazing after him as he goes to door*): Good night, old humbug. (*Laughs a little.*)

PUTTOCK: Come round to-morrow, Quinton, for that prize.

QUINTON: I don't think I can.—I can't stand any of you just now. [Exit.

[*Pause.* PUTTOCK *puts on his pipe.* TRENT *comes to a sudden stop C.*

TRENT: What a fool!

PUTTOCK: He is.

TRENT: I don't mean him. Myself!

PUTTOCK: I dare say.

TRENT: Lost my head. (*Turning R.*) That's Bert. He always goes to my head like tipple. Well, well, I might have known that if you attack its mate the female will bite. So—she's gone back to Bert. And I sent her! (*Shrugs his shoulders as he sits down and gets his pipe.*)

PUTTOCK: Then I've won.

TRENT: I'll pay up to-morrow.

CURTAIN.

Title [redacted]

Author

Accession No.

Call No.

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

Title [redacted]

Author [redacted]

Accession No. [redacted]

Call No. [redacted]

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

Title

Author

Accession No.

Call No.

Borrower's No.	Issue Date	Borrower's No.	Issue Date

ACT IV

Next day. Early evening. Sitting-room at the WALTERS', *as in Act I.*

[MRS. WALTERS *enters, followed by* EDGAR TATT.

MRS. WALTERS: Come in and sit down. It is nice of you to come so soon. But there, I expect you want to know about last night.

EDGAR (*sheepishly*): Well—no—as a matter of fact I—I came to see Iris.

MRS. WALTERS: There's a lover! She isn't in yet, but she'll be home any minute. I declare what with all the bother I'd almost forgotten your engagement. I don't wonder, I'm sure. I'm driven nearly mad.

EDGAR: Hasn't it all blown over yet?

MRS. WALTERS: Nothing's happened—that's just it. Not a word from anybody. Bert wasn't fit to stand this morning, and as cross as a bear with a sore head. He wouldn't go to Uncle the first thing, as I begged him to, and apologise.

EDGAR: But I say, what's he got to apologise for? Anybody might get tight——

MRS. WALTERS: Of course they might, and anybody but Uncle would know it and make allowances. But he won't. It isn't as if he didn't take a drop himself now and then. I've seen the bottles. It's just because he is what he is, and doesn't understand ordinary people. How I begged Bert to come away last night, but he wouldn't. There he was, making a pretty fool of himself, and nobody knows how it's going to affect us all. It may be the ruin of us, with Uncle. If only Bert would just go up and say he's sorry.

EDGAR: I don't suppose he felt much like it, first thing, what? (*Laughs.*)

MRS. WALTERS: I know he didn't—he was like a sick dog. But with Uncle, you've got to make an effort. Aren't I always making efforts? You're going to be one of the family now, and you'll soon know what I have to put up with.

EDGAR (*soothingly*): Bert'll put it all right to-night. But can't Miss Marsh—Stella—do anything?

MRS. WALTERS: A fat lot of good she's doing. She hasn't been near Uncle all this day. Gone out, if you please, first thing in the morning without a word to anyone. That's a nice thing for me, isn't it?

EDGAR: I say! Where's she gone?

MRS. WALTERS: How should I know? Never a word to me or anybody. Temper, I suppose—though if anyone ought to have a temper it isn't her. A nice mess she made of it, calling Uncle the names she did.

[IRIS *comes in. She is just home from the City and, as always, dressed smartly.*

IRIS (*to* EDGAR): You! What on earth are you doing here?

EDGAR: I—I've brought you some rings to choose from.

IRIS (*with pretended indifference*): I can't bother with rings just now. Give me time to get home.

[*Nevertheless she comes up to him. He hands her a box, and then tries to kiss her. She pushes him from her, laughing pertly.*

Oh, don't be silly!

MRS. WALTERS: Iris, what a way to behave. I'm sure it isn't my fault, Edgar. She was brought up properly.

[*Ignoring* MRS. WALTERS, *the two look over the rings.*

MRS. WALTERS: She isn't home, Iris.

IRIS (*indifferently*): What?

MRS. WALTERS: Stella isn't back yet.

IRIS: You don't mean she's been gone all day?

EDGAR: Nice goings on, aren't they? Playing truant.

MRS. WALTERS: What Uncle will say I can't think.

IRIS: Hasn't he asked for her—rung the bell or anything?

MRS. WALTERS: No. I went up once and knocked, but there wasn't any answer. I tried the door, but it was locked and he shouted at me. You know his way.

IRIS: Old beast. Does Bert know about Stella?

MRS. WALTERS: Yes. She'd gone before he came down. He was frightfully late getting off.

EDGAR: I say, she's a nice sort of young lady to have.

MRS. WALTERS: I wanted her to take up Bert's tea—being engaged, I think it's all right with me in the house. I got it all ready, but before I could turn round the young miss had flown.

IRIS: What did Bert say?

MRS. WALTERS: He was too ill to notice anything. He only had time to swallow a cup of strong tea and be off.

EDGAR: Where do you suppose she's gone?

MRS. WALTERS: I can't think. She's got no friends in London except us.

EDGAR: I say!

IRIS: There's a knock.

MRS. WALTERS: Perhaps that's her. (*Hurries out.*)

EDGAR: It's a bit thick, isn't it, going off like that?

IRIS: Oh, she's an idiot. I wouldn't like to be her when Bert comes in, that's all. These rings are too large.

[EDGAR *tries to get hold of her hand to put on a ring. There is a playful struggle, and he gets it.*

EDGAR: What lovely hands you've got!

IRIS: Stupid! Whatever made you bring opals? They're unlucky.

EDGAR: Have diamonds then. (*Tries another on. Suddenly.*) I say!

IRIS: Oh, say it!

EDGAR: She's only a country girl.

IRIS: Who? Are you still bothering about her?

EDGAR: To be out in London all day by herself.

IRIS: Nobody is going to run off with her.

EDGAR: She's fine girl, you know.

IRIS: I don't admire your taste.

EDGAR: Well, some chaps would say so. Bert does, for one.

IRIS: And why? Because she's the quiet sort who never says "Boo" to them. Whatever Master Bert does she'll

always say "Yes." Mind you don't come home tight. I'll say something more than "Boo" to you.

EDGAR (*laughing*): I bet you would. You've got some spirit.

[*He tries to kiss her, and while they are struggling* MRS. WALTERS *and* MRS. TATT *enter.*

MRS. WALTERS: It wasn't Stella after all.

MRS. TATT (*affecting to be shocked by the lovers*): Did you see that? Well, I never!

[*The lovers separate,* EDGAR *very embarrassed.* MRS. WALTERS *and* MRS. TATT *sit near together.*

MRS. WALTERS: It's all very well for them to be able to forget things. I wish I could be lively when there's all this trouble in the house.

IRIS: Oh, shut up, mother! It's been like it before.

MRS. WALTERS: No it hasn't, miss. Bert's never been drunk in Uncle's room—and him with friends there and all. And then Stella making things worse by calling Uncle names.

MRS. TATT (*shocked*): You didn't tell me she did that.

MRS. WALTERS: Called him a cruel, wicked old man, if you please, and—— Oh, I don't know what!

MRS. TATT: How dreadful!

EDGAR: I say!

IRIS: It's time somebody called him names.

MRS. TATT (*shocked*): Iris, my dear.

MRS. WALTERS: That's all very well, and I'm sure nobody would like to do it more than I would sometimes. But suppose I did—what about his money? Everybody knows I wouldn't take insults from him just because of his money if he was in his right mind——

IRIS: He's in his right mind all right, when he likes.

MRS. WALTERS: You ought to have been upstairs last night, miss, and seen for yourself. There was Uncle, talking the way he does, saying things to Bert—and all the time Bert, blind drunk as you may say and not understanding a word. Doesn't that show Uncle's mad?

EDGAR: Talking to a chap that's tight (*laughs*), and him not understanding a word of it! I say, that's rich, that is. (*Laughs again.*)

MRS. TATT: Edgar, how can you laugh at the poor old man like that? Think of what might happen to any of us.

EDGAR (*still enjoying the joke*): And old Bert blind drunk——

IRIS (*slapping him*): Oh, shut up, do!

MRS. WALTERS: And Stella told Uncle that he made fun of us——

IRIS: So he does.

MRS. WALTERS: And if he does, doesn't that show plainly that he's not right in his head? If he had laughed at poor Bert for being drunk I could have understood it. I'm sure I've laughed myself sometimes, for he does cut a figure. But that wasn't it.

MRS. TATT: There's no doubt he's not sane, for if he was he must admire you all tremendously, as everyone else does, you, so hard-working; such a mother. Bert, except for a little lapse now and again and then only natural, as you might say—such a good son and getting on so well at his office. And Iris—such a good daughter—so smart (*waves her hand affectionately at* IRIS); and Basil doing so splendidly in the City. I'm sure, dear—if I may call you so, for aren't we to be sisters now that our dear children are to become one?—anybody who has any sense at all must admire you and only wish there were thousands more families like yours.

MRS. WALTERS (*much touched*): I'm sure it's very kind of you—and it only brings home to me more than ever how queer poor Uncle really is. And when Stella comes back I shall give her a good talking to and make her apologise to him. For Bert's sake she ought to do it.

MRS. TATT: Do you know what I think? She's gone off because she's frightened. She knows she's done wrong in breaking out like that against poor Mr. Trent, and she knew you wouldn't like it, and Bert wouldn't like it, and Mr.

Trent wouldn't like it, and she felt like a naughty child who hides herself for fear of being punished. I know I used to feel just like that when I was a little girl and disobeyed my own dear mother. If I may say so, the best thing will be for everyone to be kind to her when she comes in. You see if she doesn't come back just like that, ready to tell Bert she's sorry. Oh, it'll be all right. I feel it in my bones.

MRS. WALTERS (*sighing*): Well, if I can get her and Bert to make it up with Uncle to-night I shall be able to sleep.

[BERT *enters. He looks round disgustedly at the number of people in the room.*

MRS. TATT: Ah, here he is—and after being so naughty too. Fie! (*She shakes her finger at him.*)

BERT (*sulkily*): Evening.

EDGAR: What-o, old sport!

BERT: Same to you.

[*He gives the merest nod to* MRS. TATT *and no greeting to anyone else. He comes to fire.*

Shove up, Iris, and let me see the fire.

IRIS: You look a beauty, you do.

MRS. TATT: He'll be better after a quiet evening and a good night's rest.

MRS. WALTERS: She isn't back yet, Bert.

BERT (*rousing*): What?

MRS. WALTERS: Stella isn't back.

BERT: What the devil!—Where is she then?

IRIS: How should we know?

MRS. WALTERS: She hasn't been near all day.

BERT: Didn't she say anything to anybody?

MRS. WALTERS: No. If she had, shouldn't I know——

BERT (*interrupting*): Didn't she say anything to you, Iris?

IRIS: Why should she say anything to me?

BERT: She sleeps in your room.

IRIS: I didn't speak to her this morning; she got up too early.

BERT: What about last night?

IRIS: She wouldn't speak a word; she was crying most of the time.

MRS. TATT: Oh, poor thing, that was because she was afraid of what she'd done. Why didn't you speak to her, dear?

IRIS: Oh, I couldn't bother with her.

BERT: You're a nice lot, letting her go off like this.

IRIS: She's your business.

MRS. WALTERS (*aggrieved, to* BERT): I like that, after what I've done and put up with.

BERT: Oh, cheese it. This is a nice thing to face a man when he comes home with a rotten head. If she was sorry for what she'd done, this wasn't the best way of showing it.

IRIS: I bet she's sick with you and gone off in a temper.

BERT: And what's wrong with me?

IRIS: You were a bit filthy last night.

MRS. WALTERS: Iris, whatever next! Stella wouldn't think of that.

MRS. TATT: And after the way she stood up for him last night—as you told me, dear. (*To* MRS. WALTERS.)

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, it was beautiful to see her——

MRS. TATT: Not but what any woman would do the same.

BERT: I should think so.

EDGAR: Any decent girl would stick by her chap.

MRS. WALTERS: Anyway, it's time she was home now.

BERT: What did Uncle say? Did she make it all right with him?

MRS. WALTERS: She didn't go near him——

BERT: What?

MRS. WALTERS: I tell you, she's been gone all day; she hasn't been near him.

BERT: That's a bit thick. How are we going to get the old man round?

MRS. WALTERS: You'd better go up together this evening.

BERT: I'm damned if I go. Stell can explain. That's enough. It's she who made a fool of herself, calling him what

you say she did. It isn't the first time he's seen a chap a bit above himself, and I bet that won't worry him. Stell can put the rest right. I'll send her up.

MRS. WALTERS: That's all very well.

BERT: Oh, that's enough! Anybody would think I hadn't got a head on me.

[MRS. WALTERS *and* MRS. TATT *exchange meaning glances. They rise.*

MRS. TATT: Well, dear, I mustn't stop any longer. I only just ran in as I was passing to know how things were. Good night, Bert, you'll be better after a good night's rest. (BERT *ignores her.*) Good night, my dear new daughter (*kisses* IRIS), and good night, Edgar, I suppose. (*Playfully.*) I see what it is now—all my evenings lonely. My boy will always be round here, and never think of his poor old mother at home. Well, well, we've all been lovers and can understand.

[MRS. WALTERS *and* MRS. TATT *go out.* BERT *sits close to fire.* EDGAR *and* IRIS *put the rings into their box; there is a sly kiss and a little struggling.*

BERT (*sourly*): Don't mind me.

IRIS: If you don't like it, go into the other room. There's a fire.

BERT: I didn't say I did mind. Go yourself!

[*Whispered consultation between the lovers.*

IRIS: If you want your own company, such as it is, you can have it. (*Goes out, flouncing.*)

EDGAR (*to* BERT, *knowingly, as he crosses to door*): I say, that was a lark!

BERT: What? Must have missed it.

EDGAR: You and Nunky—the old chap calling you names and you blind drunk and never heard a word. (*Exit, laughing.*)

[BERT *turns away disgustedly. Throws himself back in chair. Pause.* DAISY *enters. She is dressed for going out. She hesitates an instant on seeing* BERT. *He looks round*

expectantly—but she is obviously not the person he expected.

BERT: Oh, come in!—How many more!

DAISY (*bridling*): I'm sure I don't want to intrude.

[BERT *turns to look at her, and shows a lazy but admiring interest.*

BERT: What do you want? All dressed up and nowhere to go.

DAISY: I've got plenty of places to go to, thank you. (*Crosses to mirror.*)

BERT: And plenty to go with?

DAISY: Plenty.

BERT: What is it to-night—and who is it?

DAISY: Never you mind.

[*Having surveyed herself, she turns away from mirror.* BERT *catches her by the arm.*

BERT: But I do mind. I must look after your morals.

DAISY: Let me go.

BERT: What did you come in for?

DAISY: To look at myself in a decent glass—mine is two inches square.

BERT: I'll tell you if you're all right.

[*There is a struggle for a kiss.* MRS. WALTERS *opens door.* DAISY *frees herself and goes out defiantly.*

MRS. WALTERS (*indignantly*): Of all the brazen chits! What's she doing here?

BERT: Admiring herself.

MRS. WALTERS: And what were you doing with her?

BERT: Mind your own business.

MRS. WALTERS: As if we hadn't bother enough, for you to go and carry on——

BERT: What do you want now?

MRS. WALTERS: Stella's back.

BERT: She is!

MRS. WALTERS: She's been in we don't know how long. Iris found her in the bedroom.

BERT: Tell her to come here.

MRS. WALTERS: She won't say where she's been except that she's been walking.

BERT (*easily masterful*): I'll deal with her.

[*Exit* MRS. WALTERS. *Pause.* BERT *stands up before the fire.* STELLA *comes in. She is still wearing her hat and outdoor frock. She looks tired and overwrought.* BERT *looks her over with cheerful condescension.*

BERT: Well, and where the dickens have you been?

[STELLA *pauses C. Her manner is timid but determined.*

Come here.

STELLA (*not moving*): I've been out.

BERT (*playful, humouring her*): You don't say so! You're a nice young woman, playing truant. Come and confess.

[STELLA *does not move, but stands looking at him, twisting her hands nervously.*

STELLA: I——

[*Puzzled by her attitude,* BERT *crosses to her. He puts his arm round her.*

BERT: You naughty little girl. (*He lifts her chin so that he may see her face properly.*)

STELLA (*shrinking a little*): Don't——

BERT: Don't what? (*He thinks she must be afraid.*) Is she afraid of being scolded then? Come, kiss me like a good girl, and then I'll tell you what I think of you.

STELLA: Don't—don't. (*She averts her face and he gets annoyed.*)

BERT: What the devil's the matter with you? Look here, are you ratty with me because of last night?

STELLA: No, it isn't that.

BERT: I dare say I looked a bit of an ass, but any chap might do the same. And, anyhow, you about made it square, going off like this without a by your leave to anybody. You never came to see how I was.

STELLA: I'm sorry. I never thought——

BERT: I'll forgive you because you stuck by me all right last night, I hear, when the old man let go.

STELLA: Last night! Oh, that was horrible!

BERT: From what I can hear the old chap was a bit thick. But we'll get him round, you and I together. Come now, give me a kiss, and then we'll go to the old chap hand-in-hand and ask him to kiss and be friends.

[*Having, as he thinks, made everything comfortable, he attempts to take her in his arms. To his surprise she slips from him, standing at a little distance.*

STELLA: Don't—don't kiss me. I don't want you to. I don't want to marry you.

BERT (*dumbfounded*): What!

STELLA (*rushing on impetuously*): I'm so sorry—I hope you will forgive me. I know I oughtn't to have got engaged to you, but I never thought—I should ever be like this. But—please—I don't want to get married——

[*Recovering a little,* BERT *takes her by the arm.*

BERT: Do you know what you're talking about?

STELLA: I don't want to marry anybody. I want to go away.

BERT: What on earth will you say next? Look here, you're tired with marching round the town all day. You'd better go to bed and get over it.

STELLA (*desperately*): I mean it—I've been thinking about it all day.

BERT: You're off your head. Just think now, if you throw me over I shan't take you back. I'm not that sort.

STELLA: I'm very sorry. I know I'm behaving badly——

BERT: I should think you are. (*More quietly.*) And you don't mean it. Last night upset you.

STELLA: It wasn't that—not just that. It's been for a long time now. I thought I was in love with you—and then I found I wasn't.

BERT: What do you know about being in love—a kid like you?

STELLA (*looking round helplessly*): I'm very sorry——

BERT: You're young, that's what's the matter with you. Lots of girls are like that before they're married. You'll get over it. Now, give me a kiss.

[*Again he attempts to get a kiss. She breaks from him.*

STELLA: I can't. I mean it—I—I don't want to marry you.

[MRS. WALTERS *enters and stares at them.*

MRS. WALTERS: Well, I never! I'd better go, I think!

STELLA: Don't go yet. I'm going—I'm going away.

MRS. WALTERS (*astonished*): What——!

BERT (*angrily*): She's off her head.

STELLA: I've made a mistake. I don't want to get married.

MRS. WALTERS (*incredulous*): You don't mean to say you're giving Bert up?

[IRIS *and* EDGAR *come in. Iris is dressed for going out.*

IRIS: Shan't be back till—— (*Taking in the scene.*)

MRS. WALTERS: A silly little lovers' quarrel.

IRIS (*to* BERT): About the way you behaved last night, I suppose?

STELLA: No—no. It wasn't that. Bert has been so kind—you've all been kind—but I—I don't want to marry him or —or anyone. I want to go away. (*Looks round appealingly.*) Please forgive me.

[*Nobody responds; they are all too astounded.* STELLA *crosses quickly to door, just in time to meet* EVELYN *and* BASIL *entering.* STELLA *rushes past them.*

EVELYN (*staring after her*): Good heavens, what manners!

BASIL (*looking round*): What's up?

IRIS: That's what we want to know.

MRS. WALTERS: Stella's given Bert up.

EDGAR: I say!

BERT: She hasn't given me up. I'd like to see any girl do that. If you want to know—she's afraid of being married.

BASIL: What!

[*General laughter except from* MRS. WALTERS.

EVE: Tell me another.

IRIS: There's somebody else.

BERT: You can believe it or not, as you like.

EDGAR: I say, she must be soft.

IRIS: I always said she was.

BASIL: You're well rid of her, my boy.

MRS. WALTERS: I don't know what girls are coming to—throwing up a good chance like Bert. I can't make it out.

BASIL: Get your next girl in London, old man—they know what's what.

MRS. WALTERS: You can say what you like, but she'd have made Bert a good wife, even if she was a bit slow. If you take my advice, Bert, you'll go after her and get her to come back.

BERT: I'll be damned if I ask any girl back.

MRS. WALTERS: There's another thing, Stella was the only one who got on properly with Uncle Martin.

IRIS: Who would take the trouble to, you mean.

MRS. WALTERS: If Bert knows his way about, which he does, he'll keep in with her. That affair last night will soon blow over if you both go up and apologise. He gets on with Stella when he won't look at anybody else.

BASIL: He's never seen Eve.

EVELYN: Oh, thanks—I wouldn't go near him for a million.

IRIS: There's Daisy, if he must have a slave.

MRS. WALTERS: And now what are we to tell him.

BERT: Tell him the truth, that she's gone. I'll tell him.

BASIL (*with a sudden laugh*): Fancy old Bert being let in for a girl who didn't like being married!

BERT: You shut up.

BASIL: Thought you knew your way about better.

BERT (*angrily*): Anyhow, it's better than getting a girl who knows too much.

BASIL (*also angry*): What do you mean?

MRS. WALTERS (*soothingly*): Now you two——

BERT (*to all*): And I'd like to know who asked you to shove yourselves into my affairs.

[*A babel of angry voices ensues.*

IRIS: We didn't shove——

EDGAR: I say——

BASIL: We don't want anything to do——

BERT: The whole blooming lot of you——

EVELYN: I'm sure we don't care what happens——

MRS. WALTERS: Now then, stop it——

[*At its height the door opens and* TRENT *appears. Sudden complete hush.* BERT, *as usual, recovers first.*

BERT: Hullo, Uncle—come in! A return visit, eh? Come and join the cackle; take a roost.

[TRENT *disregards everyone but* MRS. WALTERS.

TRENT: A word with you. I leave here to-morrow.

[*Even* BERT'S *confidence is shaken for an instant. Pause.* Do you hear? That's all.

[*He turns to go, but* BERT *comes up to him quickly and affects a conciliatory jocular manner.*

BERT: Now, Uncle, what's all this, eh? I know I was an ass last night——

MRS. WALTERS (*interrupting anxiously*): He is very sorry —he knows he oughtn't to have come to your room——

TRENT: Bert? I've nothing to say to him.

MRS. WALTERS (*getting in front of* TRENT *so that he cannot leave the room*): He wouldn't have come if he hadn't been a little the worse for drink. It doesn't often happen, Uncle—but we had a little party——

BERT (*pushing her away*): Leave this to me, mater. I'm sorry, Uncle——

TRENT (*irritably*): Get drunk in any room—all the rooms —it doesn't matter to me. I'm going.

BERT: Look here, I've said I'm sorry, and I'll take an oath if you like I won't come near your rooms. You see,

my girl was there, and it was only natural I should come after her, wasn't it? But now she's gone——

TRENT (*turning on him sharply*): Gone?

MRS. WALTERS: I tried to get her to come to you and apologise——

TRENT (disregarding this): Where has she gone?

MRS. WALTERS: We don't know. She's behaved very badly. Do you want her? Iris—Bert—Uncle wants to see Stella. Perhaps she hasn't left the house yet. (*Looks round vaguely, but nobody offers to go and look.*) I'll go and see. (*Hurries out.*)

[TRENT'S *manner changes abruptly. He is now all chuckling malicious interest.*

TRENT (*looking round at everyone, but addressing no one in particular*): So she's not going to marry Bert?

[BERT *takes this quieter mood as a good sign.*

BERT: Not this time, Uncle, not unless she comes round. I did my best to make it all right, but a girl has got to do hers, eh?

TRENT: Oh certainly, certainly.

BERT: She's rather a queer sort of girl, you know, after all. Of course, I always knew she wasn't quite our sort.

TRENT: Queer, was she?

BERT: Said she didn't want to get married at all. What do you think of that? Rummy, eh?

TRENT (*looking round again with a sly laugh*): Very—very rummy. (*Digs* BERT *in the ribs.*) But there are plenty more. Oh yes.

BERT: Well, that's a little previous, isn't it? Off with the old love first, you know, eh. Still, I must say it's queer. She'd got nobody in the world to look to but me, and I could give her a nice home and all that, and though I say it as shouldn't, I'd make her a good husband.

TRENT (*impressively*): It's my belief, just between you and me, she fell in love with—Hippo.

BERT: What!

[*All look at one another, half startled by what they take as evidence of* TRENT'S *madness.*

TRENT: Always looking at him. Strange, very. (*Wags his head knowingly.*) I myself—I'm in love with Venus.

BERT: Now, come, come, Uncle; there are ladies present.

TRENT: Been queer has she—lately?

BERT: Now you come to speak of it, she has been rather off colour——

TRENT: Soon after she began to come upstairs?

BERT: That's about it.

TRENT: And Hebe, handmaiden to the gods, fell in love with Hippo! This explains all.

BERT: Perhaps you're right, but if she wants that sort of thing she's no use to me.

MRS. WALTERS: She hasn't left the house yet—she's putting her things together. She's coming in a minute.

BERT: It's all right; Uncle doesn't want her now.

TRENT (*abruptly*): I'll see her.

MRS. WALTERS: Yes, yes, you shall. She'll soon be here. (*Looking round.*) Uncle will want to see her alone, won't you?

[*All but* TRENT, MRS. WALTERS *and* BERT *go out.*

She ought to apologise to you.

TRENT: There shall be an apology.

MRS. WALTERS: And you're going to take her back?

TRENT: I don't want her back.

[MRS. WALTERS *is nonplussed.*

BERT: I told you so, mater.

MRS. WALTERS (*ingratiatingly to* TRENT): And you're not going to leave us, are you?

TRENT: To-morrow.

MRS. WALTERS: And—and the house——?

TRENT: I don't want it. (*With sudden impishness, staring at her so that she backs from him.*) I am Diogenes, and live in a tub; I am a philosopher, and sit on a moonbeam studying

the world through a telescope. (*As suddenly becoming normal.*) As for the house—you can have it.

MRS. WALTERS (*effusively*): Oh, Uncle, how good of you! Do you hear that, Bert?

BERT: That's A1, Nunky.

MRS. WALTERS: Now I'll go and hurry Stella. Come, Bert—Uncle won't want us. [*Exit*

BERT: Well, I'll be off—bit awkward meeting her just now. (*Holding out his hand.*) We part friends then, Uncle, eh?

TRENT (*grasping his hand and staring at him earnestly*): My dear Bert!

BERT (*patting* TRENT'S *hand kindly*): That's all right. See you later. So long.

[*Exit.* TRENT *makes a turn of the room, chuckling to himself in great content.* STELLA *comes in, slowly, almost unwillingly. She is wearing hat and coat, and carries a small suit-case. She pauses just inside and looks over at* TRENT *doubtfully.* TRENT *pauses R.C. and looks at her. Then he comes more C., and speaks in his old friendly fashion.*

TRENT: Forgive me, Hebe.

[STELLA *is obviously surprised, this not being the greeting she anticipated.*

I was a brute last night. I often am a brute. I apologise. Forget it, will you?

[*He holds out his hand.* STELLA *puts down her case and comes forward. They meet C., and she puts her hand into his.*

TRENT: So you're not going to marry Bert?

STELLA: No—I can't. I must go away.

[*She is too overwrought to say more for the moment, but controls herself and then turns to go.* TRENT *puts his hand on her arm.*

TRENT: Where are you going?

STELLA: To Margate again.

TRENT: To-night?

STELLA: No; to-morrow.

TRENT: Where are you going to-night?

STELLA: To Mrs. Handley's sister at Clapham.

TRENT: Do you want to go back?

STELLA: I must go somewhere, and I've got nobody in London. I can get work with Mr. Handley again.

TRENT: You needn't go back. You're going to stop in London.

[*She is taken aback.*

You've got me—and Puttock and Quinton; we are all your friends.

STELLA: But I can't stop here. Bert——

TRENT (*interrupting*): I'm leaving here. I'm giving it up to Bert—and Gladys or Susanna or whoever takes your place. And here no doubt they will live and fight with mamma and quarrel with their sisters and brothers and add to the population and furnish another example of a happy and united family. My dear young lady, do you know you've shown the most magnificent common sense, the most wonderful courage? I'm proud of you. You've snapped your fingers in the face of Mother Nature. She was out to catch you, and you gave her the slip! (*Laughs.*) She'll try again—damn her—but don't worry about that. Perhaps she'll catch you, and perhaps she won't; perhaps you'll sit in a cottage with a cat and a parrot—and perhaps you'll marry a poet or a millionaire. Never mind that. Damn the past, and hold out your arms to the future!

[MRS. WALTERS *looks in.*

MRS. WALTERS: Mr. Puttock and Mr. Quinton, Uncle. Shall they go upstairs?

TRENT: No.

[MRS. WALTERS *goes.* STELLA *makes a move to leave.*

Don't go.

[PUTTOCK *and* QUINTON *come in.* STELLA *goes up R.*

PUTTOCK (*indicating* QUINTON): He's a fighting parson and wants your blood and—— (*Sees* STELLA; *stops.*) Ho-ho! (*Looks questioningly at* TRENT.)

TRENT: She's not going to marry Bert.

QUINTON: What! (*He looks quickly from* TRENT *to* STELLA, *and then goes up R.*)

TRENT: So old Mother Nature's lost!

PUTTOCK: This time!

[*They laugh.*

CURTAIN.

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